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# The consumed university: probing neoliberalism in higher education

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**THE CONSUMED UNIVERSITY: PROBING NEOLIBERALISM IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION**

by

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Antonio Redfern Pucci

### **Abstract**

This study probes the influence of neoliberal ideas and ideology in Canadian higher education. In order to examine such an influence, this study subjected the texts and artifacts from 14 Canadian university recruitment websites to a critical discourse analysis. Along with the website analysis, eight ethnographic interviews with current professors were conducted to explore, in their experiences, how neoliberal ideology shapes their work as researchers, scholars, and instructors. This study investigated the ways that neoliberalism influences Canadian universities focusing on two specific areas. The first is how do universities include neoliberal discourse in their recruitment websites and if they do, in what ways? The second question is in what ways do professors, if at all, see the effects of neoliberalism in their daily activities as educators, researchers, and members of the university community? This study is a philosophical inquiry that deploys qualitative methodologies to examine the ideological influence of neoliberalism on higher education in Canada. The importance of this hybrid approach is that it will allow for a broad discussion of the valuation of education in society. This study shows that the influence of neoliberalism in Canadian universities is real and produces changes in the way university education is conceived and relates to the outside world.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The role of education in society is constantly in flux, debated, and contested. This instability is unsurprising as economic, social, and political realities change in a dynamic world. Scholars who witness these changes often describe the shifting dynamics in alarmist terms. An earlier example of a reflection on the fluctuations of the university system can be found in Bloom (1987). Bloom's philosophical work commented on how the intent of both the universities and the students he taught had changed during his career. He reasoned that the concept of a liberal education had been lost and that because of this, his students would start their professional lives just as "empty and false as the one they left behind [before they entered university]" (p. 81). The deep pessimism of Bloom's argument is rooted in the changes in education he had witnessed, and this same pessimism has been represented in other critical works on the state of higher education.

For instance, Bercuson, Bothwell and Granatstein's two works, *The Petrified campus: The Crisis in Canada's Universities* (1997) and *The Great Brain Robbery* (1984), claimed that the essence of a university education in Canada was under threat. Despite the fact that these major works were separated by more than a decade, they both argued that the utility and purpose of universities in Canada were in a critical state. Other works on the state of higher education both in Canada and globally strike a similar note regarding the perceived dire state of universities and the education they provide. Norris (2011), Brownlee (2015), Aronowitz (2005), Côté and Allahar (2011), Giroux (1999), hooks<sup>1</sup> (1994), Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), Turk (2000) are all part of an ever-

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<sup>1</sup> bell hooks is an academic, author, and activist who purposefully uses the lowercase spelling to distinguish herself from her great grandmother from whom she picked this name.

growing chorus warning about how different forces are changing the very nature of universities and education. To be sure, these different voices are not unified in the diagnosis, but they all demand that educators, administrators, and society as a whole at least recognize the significant changes occurring within higher education as they all also acknowledge the vital role that universities play.

### **Statement of Problem**

Between 1990 and 2000, undergraduate enrolment in American degree-granting institutions rose 32 percent, and this trend continued between 2000 and 2010 with enrolment increasing by 37 percent (National Center For Educational Statistics, “Fast Facts,” n.d.). In Canada, a similar pattern played out. From 2000 to 2011, enrolments in Canadian full-time undergraduate programs grew from 81,000 students to nearly 148,000, a jump of 82 percent (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2012). From these data and other reports (The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2011), there is a clear indication that a university education is seen by many as a pursuit worth the time, energy and financial commitment that are required to attend these institutions. This interest in a university education is important because it challenges both the academy and society as a whole to clarify just what is being expected by pursuing an academic education in terms of the individual expectations of the students and the goals that a society expects from universities. Questioning the purpose of education in society requires looking at the university within the context of broader societal dynamics and the effect that the ordering of priorities may have on institutions within society.

In the research and writing of many scholars, neoliberalism and the effects of neoliberalism are characterized as a powerful force in society and within education



(Anctil, 2008; Ayers, 2005; Bourdieu, 1998; Brown, 2006; Brownlee, 2015; Côté & Allahar, 2011; Fairclough, 2002; Fryar, 2012; Germic, 2009; Giroux, 1999; Harvey, 2005; Mitchell, 2003; Norris, 2011; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Turk, 2000; Žižek, 2010). The ideas of neoliberalism were developed and popularized by economists and thinkers like Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman (Harvey 2005). The essential concept of neoliberal thought is that economic freedom is necessary for political freedom and that the role of government should be limited to only the most basic functions of national defence, law creation and enforcement (Marginson, 2009). The ideas of neoliberalism will be further explained in the following chapter. However, it is the fundamental premise of this study that neoliberalism is a powerful ideological force within society and this might be manifested in the functions of institutes of higher education in Canada.

### **Research Question**

This study concentrates on exploring neoliberalism in the context of higher education. The research will focus specifically on university recruitment websites. These websites are a critical method for universities to recruit potential students as recent scholarship has demonstrated (Anctil, 2008; Carlson, 2010; Taylor & Morpew, 2010). The primary research question that is investigated in this study is: in what ways does neoliberalism influence Canadian universities? From this overarching research question two further questions will be addressed and these are:

How and in what ways do universities include neoliberal discourse in their recruitment websites?

In what ways might professors see the effects of neoliberalism in their daily activities as educators, researchers, and members of the university community?

This research incorporates qualitative research methodologies but is grounded in philosophy and critical theory. Grounding the study in critical theory follows a genealogy of ideas that is evident in my work in this thesis and throughout the entirety of my doctoral education and traces back to my previous background in political philosophy. My background in philosophy and critical theory has informed the approach of the study and utilizes the qualitative methodologies of both critical discourse theory and ethnography to examine neoliberalism's impact on universities. The strength of a hybrid approach is that it will bring to bear the theoretical strengths of a more philosophically-based inquiry and it while maintaining the grounded aspects of both critical discourse analysis and an ethnographic approach.

### **Significance of the Study**

The use of the Internet as a primary research tool for almost any major purchase is only growing, and universities seemingly recognize this trend as they seek to expand their online presence. It is important to examine the language used to represent universities on these websites and see to what extent neoliberal terms and ideas are marshalled to recruit students. As these websites are created by the institutions without any filters on what they might wish to say to the outside world, it is logical to view these websites, as being statements on the value of a university education, or what the universities believe the public wishes to see as the role of universities.

The importance of studying the effect of neoliberalism's potential effects on the university, as opposed to other potential ideological influences, is based on the concern

that the goals of the market are not aligned to the proper functioning of the academy. This argument has been made by a number of scholars and their thoughts on the effects of neoliberalism will be fully developed in the contextual section of this study. However, not all effects of neoliberalism on the academy are necessarily negative or positive. For instance, market based models of providing education might give students a stronger position to demand better facilities, experiences, and instruction from a university. Increasing the choice of universities could allow for a wider cross section of students successfully completing a degree and making their lives richer both in a material, and nonmaterial, sense. Nevertheless, these changes, if they are occurring, should be studied because they do change the idea of what universities and education provides to both the student and society. Neoliberal ideas and practices are seemingly an important aspect of change throughout society as has been demonstrated by a growing body of literature, and therefore the potential effects on universities is an important avenue of research.

By specifically examining neoliberal discourse and its incorporation—or lack of incorporation—into how universities represent themselves in their institutional websites, this study will look at how neoliberalism is represented in higher education. Doing so will help contribute to a growing field of research into the impact of neoliberal ideology throughout society and within education (Ayers, 2005; Bauman & Donskis, 2016; Brownlee, 2015; Conlon, 2000; Côté & Allahar, 2011; Fairclough, 1995; Giroux, 1999; Norris, 2011; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). This investigation will also be given context through the thoughts and experiences of well-placed professors in the field of education. These interviews follow a history of using ethnographic methods to investigate changes

within a defined sub-culture of society (Biehl & McKay, 2012; Erickson, 1984; Johnson, 1990; Spradley, 1980).

Even though this study employs two strong qualitative methodologies to investigate the adoption or infiltration of neoliberalism into the academy, it is carried out in the spirit and practice of a philosophical inquiry into the current nature of higher education in Canada. The importance of a hybrid approach is that it will allow for a broad discussion of the valuation of education in society. This study will examine the way that university education has adapted to a consumer society, and studies the linguistic choices made by universities to differentiate their education from other institutions and how professors see their role. My analysis is a fundamental philosophical inquiry into the purpose of education, in the same tradition as Plato's *Republic* (trans. 1968), Rousseau's *Emile* (1762/1979) and Bloom's (1987) *The Closing of the American Mind*, and by using both critical discourse analysis and ethnographic interviews to interrogate the contemporary educational landscape this study situates itself in the present while asking fundamental and long lasting questions about education.

### **Organization of the Study**

The study has been organized by presenting in the opening chapter, a brief introduction to the topic of neoliberalism and university recruitment websites. Following the introduction, there was the statement of the problem, the purpose the study, the research question and the significance of the study. In Chapter 2, I provide an in-depth discussion of the context of neoliberalism in both society and within the academy itself. Chapter 3 explains the methodological choices and data collection procedures for both parts of this study. Chapter 4 focuses on the website analysis and provides a description

of the highly affected, the moderately affected and slightly affected categories. Chapter 5 then offers the analysis of the interviews and organize the responses in general categories of both agreement and differences in opinions. In Chapter 6, the two research methods are brought together, and connections between the findings will be drawn. Finally, Chapter 7 presents a contextualization of the findings grounded in the philosophy based hybrid approach that was discussed earlier in this chapter and identifies implications derived from the study. Organizing the study in this manner will allow for a logical progression of ideas. By beginning with the discussion of neoliberalism as a concept and political force before explaining the methods of the study and then an analysis of the results and conclusions that come from the study and the previously discussed conceptual understanding of neoliberalism, the document will present a coherent line of reasoning from beginning to end.

## **Chapter 2: Context**

As stated in the introduction, there has been a sharp rise over the past 20 years in both the enrolment in undergraduate programs and the cost of these programs throughout North America. For instance, from 1980 to 2010, enrollment in Canadian full-time undergraduate programs more than doubled and part-time enrolment is 16% higher (The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2011, p. 5). This growth in enrolment has occurred as tuition fees have increased at more than double the rate of inflation since the early 1990s (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2012, p. 108). Both of these facts must be kept in mind in the following discussion of the context of neoliberalism in the university because they demonstrate a desire, at the societal level, for higher education during a period where the cost of this education is increasing. Increased demand in post-secondary education begs the question, what are students pursuing in their educations and what should universities be providing? The essential purpose of education is at the heart of this discussion. This chapter provides two broad schools of thought when answering both of these questions, while also discussing the context in which this study is situated. It also defines neoliberalism, and discusses the history of neoliberalism, the relationship between neoliberalism and globalization, and finally, its impact on the academy. Additionally, this chapter provides context for the research questions and outline an understanding of the important aspects of neoliberal ideology.

### **Education for What?**

There are differing perspectives and schools of thought involved in discussing issues as significant and fundamental as the core purpose of education. However, for brevity and the scope of this chapter, I focus on two broad schools of thought. One school

of thought sees the purpose of education as an emancipatory practice that provides knowledge of how society works and an individual's place within it, and thus education is believed to equip the student with tools to change and engage society (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 1980). The other is based in a market-based understanding of nearly all functions within a society (Friedman, 2002; Hayek, 2014; von Mises, 2012). This market-based belief does not rule out the lofty goals of the emancipatory school but, it does view all policy options in terms of maximizing economic efficiency. They are not mutually exclusive but there are obvious tensions between the two schools of thought.

**The emancipatory ideal.** The basic underpinning of this idea of education, as described by Giroux (1980), traces its roots back to classical Greece. The belief was that education is:

intrinsically political, designed to educate the citizen for intelligent and active participation in the civic community. Moreover, intelligence was viewed as an extension of ethics, a manifestation and demonstration of the doctrine of the good and just life. Thus, in this perspective, education was not meant to train. Its purpose was to cultivate the formation of virtuous character in the ongoing quest for freedom. Therefore, freedom was always something to be created, and the dynamic that informed the relationship between the individual and the society was based on a continuing struggle for a more just and decent political community. (p. 329)

Giroux outlines the basic belief that education provides good for both the citizen and the society. It helps develop an historical perspective and connects the student to his or her

political surroundings. In this way, education is integral not only to the benefit of the individual, but also the functioning of the public sphere and politics as a whole.

The idea of education being a possible tool of emancipation is not limited to a classical understanding of education. hooks (1994), who purposefully uses the lowercase spelling of her pen name, describes both the oppressive and emancipatory possibilities for education. In her experiences as a student in a segregated school in Kentucky, hooks recalls how the teachers were on a mission of emancipation. Her description was of teachers who were:

committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers—black folks who used our ‘minds’. We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization. Though they did not define or articulate these practices in theoretical terms, my teachers were enacting a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anticolonial. Within these segregated schools, black children who were deemed exceptional, gifted, were given special care. Teachers worked with and for us to ensure that we would fulfil our intellectual destiny and by so doing uplift the race. My teachers were on a mission. (p. 2)

Despite this early introduction to education as emancipation, hooks saw in her university career, a lack of passion or excitement for teaching.

The example that hooks gives is that one of the essential qualities of a good education is that it provides students with modes of resistance to hegemonic systems. Even though hooks went to university with a sense of purpose and passion for learning,



the environment she encountered was anything but inspiring. Instead, she describes how it was a shock to find that professors lacked that passion and even made it seem as though excitement for education was seemingly "disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process" (p. 7). The point that hooks argues is that, "the primary lesson was reinforced: we were to learn obedience to authority" (p. 4). Moreover, hooks claims that classrooms have, "been a place where education has been undermined by teachers and students alike who seek to use it as a platform for opportunistic concerns rather than as a place to learn" (p. 12). hooks' insight here is that education is not necessarily liberating and in fact, can reinforce societal hegemony.

The view of education as traditionally being a form of control is an idea that is central to the critique that Freire (2005) raises. Freire argues for the need for education to be a dialogical practice. This concept of education means that education must not impose its program onto the people but must "search for this program dialogically with the people" (p. 124). This view of education is meant to derive its meaning from the students and community for it to be relevant and liberating to their lives.

In all three of these ideas of education as exemplified by Giroux, hooks, and Freire, there is a continuous theme of emancipation, the importance of the student's growth both as an individual and as a member of their community and finally, a political relevance to the act of education as well as the outcome of teaching. This school of thought values these intangible results of education as the ideal primary goals of education. I will argue that this focus on the intangible is in contrast to the much more market-orientated school of thought.

**Market-orientated.** The second view of education is related to a broader political movement that can broadly be seen as market-centric or market-orientated and directly relates to the foundational ideology of neoliberalism. Because this is not an educational specific school of thought but rather a general view of government and policy development, the foundational thinkers are influential for their economic and political ideas. This includes scholars from both the Austrian and Chicago school of economic thought and whose prominent members include von Mises, Hayek, and Friedman (Harvey, 2005). The basic assumption or argument of this broad group of thinkers is that economic freedom is necessary for political freedom and that any other system of economics, especially socialism, is automatically a danger to freedom. Von Mises (2012) puts the choice between capitalism and socialism in the following terms:

Socialism cannot be realized because it is beyond human power to establish it as a social system. The choice is between capitalism and chaos. A man who chooses between drinking a glass of milk and a glass of a solution of potassium cyanide does not choose between two beverages; he chooses between life and death. A society that chooses between capitalism and socialism does not choose between two social systems; it chooses between social cooperation and the disintegration of society. Socialism is not an alternative to capitalism; it is an alternative to any system under which men can live as human beings. To stress this point is the task of economics as it is the task of biology and chemistry to teach that potassium cyanide is not a nutriment but a deadly poison. (p. 676)

Von Mises, puts forward the absolute conviction that the neoliberal schools of thought advocates might possesses. Von Mises reveals a deep belief in the necessity and morality

of capitalism. The metaphor of the choice between milk and a solution of potassium cyanide may border on hyperbole but it is illustrative of the ferocity of the belief in markets to ensure personal liberty that is found throughout this school of thought's view of the world.

Of course, each of these thinkers has specific ideas on the ordering of both society and the economy, but they, and others of this school of thought, have a combined influence on political debate that has been the drive towards the ever-greater influence of the private sector and the primacy of the market in policy decisions. The influence of this school of thought has resulted in what Lyall and Sell (2006) characterize as a "profound change in political philosophy, one that shrinks the sphere of public responsibility and shifts risk to individuals, often those least able to cope with additional financial insecurity" (p. 9). In the case of higher education, the results are not limited to but include the ever-greater emphasis on choice, the personal financing of education, the adoption of market concepts in education, and the greater reliance on industrial partnerships with universities for sources of funding.

The central concern for the policy makers and administrators working from this broad view of education is how to make universities and the education they provide relevant to industry and the economy while, ideally, limiting the cost to society. For instance, François Bourguignon, the former Chief Economist of the World Bank, in his keynote address to the World Bank Conference on Development Economics in 2008 (Bourguignon, 2008), focused solely on the marketable skills that universities could provide future workers.

The neoliberal view of education sees education as a tool for economic development that provides the private sector with highly skilled workers for managerial work and other skilled positions. Proponents of this idea of the university are interested in reforming institutions of higher learning in many market-based ways, including the elimination of tenure for professors, the ending of public funding for universities, private sector partnerships for research, and the inclusion of testing regimes to ensure the quality of education (Bercuson, Bothwell & Granatstein, 1997).

For example, a conference paper from the previously referenced World Bank Conference on Development Economics, argues for the rationality of using student loans to encourage the development of skilled workers. In this paper, Barr (2008) works from classical economic theory, based on largely the same assumption as Hayek, Von Mises and Friedman, and concludes that a system of student loans is the best option for most developing economies because higher education produces a good needed by the economy and a publically financed system that relies on taxation is regressive. Barr (2008) does hold out the possibility that "higher education matters for other reasons: to promote cultural values, to protect the freedom of ideas, and to pursue new knowledge for its own sake" (p. 144). Despite other values, the central idea of Barr's approach, which is representative of this neoliberal market-orientated thinking, is that education is primarily an economically based problem especially for the policy makers and the institutions.

Such market-based private sector reforms and thinking have garnered strong support and also has met stiff resistance. Giroux (1999), for instance, argues that the adoption of corporate values:

‘mimic flexibility’, ‘competition,’ or ‘lean production’ and rationalized through the application of accounting principles—pose the threat of gutting many academic departments and programs that cannot translate their subject matter into commercial gains. (p. 157)

Giroux is referring to the managerial doctrine that may seem neutral but encompasses the same ideas and values of private industry. Thus, Giroux is suggesting that the ideas of neoliberalism can inculcate into an institution and lead to it becoming a marketed product. In this context, marketization can be taken at both its literal and more conceptual meanings. In a literal sense of the term, the marketization of education simply means marketing education as any other product. The conceptual meaning involves the adoption of market logic into the functioning of and the goals of education. Institutions and the policies that govern them are never fixed, but in the modern context, it is clear that neoliberalism is a strong force in the decision making around education and this is why understanding its roots is vital to this study.

### **Power and the History of the University**

The history of the development of modern universities is marked by a competing set of ideas of what education ought to be and the powers outside of the university that influence its purpose. The concept of educating young adults in an environment of higher education can be found, in the Western tradition, far earlier than anything resembling a modern university or college was established. For instance, Deblanco (2012), uses examples in both ancient Greece and Rome of gatherings of young men that involved some of the same activities that are common on modern university campuses. He cites examples of young Greek men attending a series of speeches, or in Augustan Rome,

where professional educators employed sports and libraries to instruct Roman men. In both these examples, there are precursors to the now familiar traditions of campus life including the idea of attending lectures, participating in varsity sport, and the value of libraries specific to the institution. This tradition of higher education, usually for elite and wealthy men only, was continued in the Middle Ages with the purpose of mainly theological teaching.

It is important, in the context of this study, to see the power and philosophical dynamics at work in the development and purpose of the university as it becomes evident that depending on the era, the idea of the university has always been in flux. For instance, as Deblanco notes, the earliest English colleges, founded in the thirteenth century, were basically religious retreats for scholars of divinity. This reflects the importance and power of the church during this period. However, this theological role for the university was challenged during the Renaissance and Enlightenment and the resulting increased power and needs of the state. Brownlee (2015) points to the demand for a secular bureaucratic elite putting pressure on universities in this era to shift from their previous theological focus and to provide a more secular education needed for the nascent national bureaucracies and militaries.

**The modern university.** In order to provide a framework to explain the shift and development of modern universities, Bok (2015) helps categorize three competing goals of the modern university in the following manner. The first broad movement for the purpose of universities that Bok identifies was the push towards using universities to train students for an occupation in a period of rapid industrialization. The general period that Bok is discussing stretches from the early 1800s to the early 1900s. This focus of

education involved the development of courses and fields of study such as, “domestic science, engineering, business administration, physical education, teacher training, and sanitation and public health” (p. 29). This pragmatic view of education is similar to what Brown (1974) associated with Isocrates’ school in ancient Greece that held that only practical knowledge was valid. Thus, there is a strong historical background for this type of education. Relating this back to the two major schools of thought identified at the beginning of this chapter, it is evident that this view of education works well with a market orientated perspective.

The second major movement in higher education that Bok identifies, relates to what might be understood as the research university idea. Bok attributes this movement’s genesis in America to the founding by John Hopkins of a graduate school focused on scientific research and scholarship. This type of university is related to the first school of thought as scientific research and training will become increasingly useful to the economic well-being of the student and the nation throughout the twentieth century. The third major movement in higher education can broadly be described as the liberal arts or humanities educational ideal. Bok argues that this movement is characterized by the effort to educate an elite class and at its core was humanities based education. The faculty members who believed in this ideal dedicated “themselves to cultivating the minds of undergraduates through well-rounded, liberal education while also producing scholarly works on literature, foreign languages, history, and philosophy” (p. 29).

This general goal of education can be found in the work of Bloom. Bloom (1974) lamented the perceived loss of this third version of the university by writing that the university has:

become incorporated into the system of ideas and goals of the society around it.

The multiversity, with its dedication to the useful as defined by society's demands, has joined hands with what appeared to be its enemy, the passion for commitment and sweeping social change which was the child of the late sixties. Now quietly they, work together, not because the flood tide has receded, but because it has swept away what obstructed it. The university, to the extent it represented the theoretical life, is more a memory than a reality. (p. 59)

Bloom's lament echoes the idea of the ancient and medieval idea of creating a refuge for theoretical thinking that is not attached to notions of practicality or economic usefulness. His view is unapologetically elitist and this differs from the emancipatory school of thought mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, there is some obvious shared ground between Bloom and the emancipatory ideal.

Côté and Allahar (2011) show how these two widely different but ultimately similar schools of thought are connected and where they depart. They argue that the elite liberal arts and humanities education championed by people like Bloom view "European literature, philosophy, art, and poetry as defining the classics, and in their Eurocentrism defined them as setting the global standards for culture and civilization." (p. 10) Eurocentric and Western idealism has been thoroughly challenged and largely discredited by what Côté and Allahar describe as the revolutionaries. They state that the revolutionaries:

shared the view that a university education was best conceived of as a liberal education, but disagreed on what should constitute the curriculum and who should comprise the teachers and the taught. This latter group, commonly called



postmodernists, wanted, to de-Europeanize the classics—to understand history as also having been made by non-Europeans, non-Christians, non-Whites, and even non-males. (p. 10)

Thus, Côté and Allahar suggest that the postmodernist revolutionaries consider literature, philosophy, history, art and other disciplines to be valuable because of the potential to empower students. Côté and Allahar argue that the main criticism of the elitists comes down to the supremacy given by these elitists to a specific Western canon thought and history.

**The Canadian context.** The history of the development of Canadian universities is a product following the federalist system of governance that shares powers between provinces and the federal government (Jones, 2014). Section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867 exclusively gives the power over education to the provinces. Thus, in comparison to some other nations, the notion of a Canadian system of higher education is almost an oxymoron as it is not as centralized as in other nations. However, as Shanahan and Jones (2007) point out, because of the federal governments' jurisdiction over national defence, external affairs, economic development and other areas that intersect with education, the federal government does have an impact on universities and education. Perhaps the most important intersection between the federal government and the provinces with regard to education is the influence derived from federal-provincial transfers of funds. The federal-provincial transfer system involves a variety of arrangements including, “cash transfers, tax point transfers” (p. 32). Federal source of funding for higher education has traditionally been a major component of the funds needed to operate and grow universities in Canada.

**Power in Canadian higher education.** Referring back to the purpose of this study, an important argument can be made by examining the general trends of funding for universities in Canada from the earliest precursors of the university system to the present day. Generally, universities in Canada rely on two primary sources of funding, government grants, with federal transfers representing a large portion of these funds, and student tuition fees. Brownlee (2015) argues that, “universities have always been dependent on—and to a varying extent constrained and controlled by—external sources of power in society. Over time, the locus of this power has shifted from the church to the state and the market” (p. 13). The observation that external sources of power have always constrained and controlled universities is borne out in the history of Canadian universities. The first period of higher education in Canada stretches from the earliest days of European colonization of North America to just after the First World War. From New France to the eventual British conquest of, and the confederation of, Canada, higher education was largely a religiously based program and because of the denominational nature of these institutions, public funding of these colleges and schools was a politically contentious idea (Jones, 2014). Thus this period demonstrates the power of the church in education. This is reflected in the small amount of public funding for universities previous to the Second World War with the funding being provided by private donations and tuition fees (Canadian Federation of Students, 2013).

The religion-based idea of education was upset by the challenge to the state and industry posed by the First World War. The crucible of total war and the success of German industry’s partnership with their higher education institutions showed the potential importance and power of having the federal government take a leading role in

promoting a strategic national vision for higher education in Canada (Jones, 2014). This strategic role for higher education was further bolstered by the efforts and successes of the Second World War. Writing in 1950, MacKenzie and Rowat argued that besides the training of personnel, universities were valuable assets in the war because of the research conducted by these institutions. They write that:

Because we customarily think of universities as educational institutions it is too easily forgotten that a function of equal importance is that of research—of pushing back the frontiers of knowledge. This function was perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the tremendous contribution made to applied science during the war by the universities in collaboration with the National Research Council. Yet the economic and technical knowledge from the social sciences that was contributed to the government's administrative departments was of parallel importance. (p. 356)

Thus, the lessons learned from both the World Wars was that universities can be and would be important strategic assets for the nation and therefore a role for federal investment in both the institutions and their research was necessary. Even if the less obvious benefits of universities to the civil society such as art and literature were dismissed, these institutions were a source of strategic power.

This ushered in the second broad period of higher education in Canada which can be demonstrated by the financial commitments to these institutions post-World War II. From the veteran's re-integration grant program, to 90 percent of the operating funds being supplied by provincial and federal government funding. This period was marked by

the large financial commitment of government to post-secondary education in Canada (Canadian Federation of Students, 2013).

The third broad period of Canadian universities is marked by a retreat of government from providing the operating funds for universities and the increased reliance on tuition fees and other sources of income to make up for the lack of government funds. Brownlee (2016) argues that the period of the federal government's retreat started in the late 1970s but has steadily increased over the last 30 years. Brownlee states that:

Canadian federal governments have steadily reduced the monetary commitment to postsecondary education through direct cuts to transfer payments and amendments to the funding formulas that determined them. Between 1983-84 and 1994-95, the federal contribution to postsecondary education was reduced by over \$13 billion. When student enrolment is taken into account, the amount of federal transfer money spent per student declined by almost 50 per cent between 1994-95 and 2004-05. (p. 18)

Unsurprisingly, the cut backs in operating funds from the federal government has produced an ever-greater burden on students and institutions to cover the costs of education. For instance, Brownlee observes that “undergraduate tuition has grown from an average of \$1,706 in 1991-92 to \$6,191 in 2015-16, an increase of 263 per cent” (p. 19).

**The dependent university.** In sum, the historical development of university education in Canada has seen institutions go from largely privately funded religious institutions, to an institution considered to be a public good and given generous funding by federal and provincial governments and finally, to being seen as a private good to be

funded by ever higher tuition fees and private-sector funding. The overall conclusion that can be drawn from this history of universities in the west and, more specifically, the history of universities in Canada, is that outside sources of power have helped develop the financial structure of university education. Or, as Brownlee (2015) puts it, “universities have always been dependent on—and to a varying extent constrained and controlled by—external sources of power in society. Over time, the locus of this power has shifted from the church to the state and the market” (p. 13). What this means for this study is that universities are by no means independent from the trends and forces of the surrounding society. No matter how much thinkers like Bloom might want the university to be a refuge from the broader society, universities are highly dependent on the goals and values of the contextual political, ideological, and economic forces in their societies.

### **The Roots of Neoliberalism**

The ideas and concepts that are at the heart of neoliberalism can be traced to a variety of sources. For instance, in his work on consumerism (a concept that plays a role in defining the individual’s relationship to society in a neoliberal framework), Norris lays out the early intellectual foundations for neoliberalism as found in both Adam Smith and Max Weber (2011, p. 20). According to Norris, Smith’s famous work *The Wealth of Nations* extolled the virtues of the market and provided an argument that “the economic sphere (the ‘invisible hand’ of the market) rather than the political sphere (the heavy-handed authority of the state) would be the determinant factor in shaping the overall life of society” (p. 20). Norris goes on to explain how Weber, in his work *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958), provided an explanation for the rapid expansion of capitalism due to the religious beliefs that valued “hard work and thrift,

while avoiding sinful luxury or self-indulgence” (p. 25). While Weber’s focus on self-denial is juxtaposed with the nearly constant call to consume in modern consumer culture, Weber provided a background of ideas in which neoliberalism found sustenance.

Neoliberalism, while tracing its roots to these earlier sources, can be understood as a reaction to the policies and regimes of the early to middle twentieth-century. This reaction is understandable given the context of both the rise of European fascism and totalitarian communist regimes in Russia and China. The result of such regimes was the formation of intellectual groups like the Mount Pelerin Society. This Society was formed in 1947 and featured such members as Friedrich von Hayek, Ludwig von Mises and Milton Friedman (Harvey, p. 20) and in their statement of aims, they reveal what prompted their belief in the market as being the solution to tyranny and political barbarism. They state that:

The group holds that these developments have been fostered by the growth of a view of history which denies all absolute moral standards and by the growth of theories which question the desirability of the rule of law. It holds further that they have been fostered by a decline of belief in private property and the competitive market; for without the diffused power and initiative associated with these institutions it is difficult to imagine a society in which freedom may be effectively preserved. (Mount Pelerin Society, n.d.)

It is important to note in this statement the Mount Pelerin Society believes that market based solutions are moral and they help diffuse power away from government control. It is from this intellectual fountainhead that the policy roots of neoliberalism are built.

Harvey (2005) recognizes the important intellectual background that economists like Mises, Hayek, and Friedman provided and then traces the policy and the implementation of these ideas to the 1950s and the rise of the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. In the context of the Cold War and the fears of the government of the United States about communist governments coming to power in Latin America, Pinochet launched a coup, supported by the Central Intelligence Agency, against the elected government of Salvador Allende, the Marxist president of Chile. After their training and education at the University of Chicago, a group of Chilean economists were brought back by the Pinochet government to improve the economy of Chile that had plummeted after the coup. Called the Chicago Boys, they were favoured by powerful business interests and introduced a host of neoliberal reforms including economic liberalization and privatisation of state owned companies (Harvey, 2005). The Chicago Boys were heavily influenced by the work of both Hayek and Friedman and advocated a variety of reforms including the privatization of government assets, foreign direct investments, and the deregulation and the privatization of natural resources. Harvey details the effect that the Chicago Boys had stating that:

The immediate revival of the Chilean economy in terms of growth rates, capital accumulation, and high rates of return on foreign investments was short-lived. It all went sour in the Latin American debt crisis of 1982. The result was a much more pragmatic and less ideologically driven application of neoliberal policies in the years that followed. All of this, including the pragmatism, provided helpful evidence to support the subsequent turn to neoliberalism in both Britain (under Thatcher) and the US (under Reagan) in the 1980s. (p. 9)

The important context that Harvey provides here is the wider geopolitical realities that lead to the adoption of these ideas throughout the world. The outbreak of the Cold War in the aftermath of the Second World coloured the political decisions of both individual nations and the globe as a whole. The support of Pinochet and the market reforms of the Chicago boys cannot be understood without the context of the Cold War antagonism between the United States and the Soviet Union. The neoliberal theorists offered a potent alternative to socialism.

As stated earlier in my discussion of the foundational philosophy of neoliberalism, theorists like von Mises, Hayek, and Friedman saw the dehumanizing regimes of fascism and totalitarian communist regimes and argued for the morality of market capitalism. This moral argument combined with the stagflation crisis in the United Kingdom and the similar capital and labour struggles in the late 1970s in the United States allowed for the rise of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (Harvey, 2005, p. 59). The rise of these politicians and the rhetorical arguments they used had a profound effect according to Harvey, as he suggests, on the presidency of Bill Clinton and the tenure as Prime Minister of Tony Blair. Both of these political opponents of the type of politics of Thatcher and Reagan inherited a political culture where there was very little room for manoeuvre outside of the parameters of neoliberalism. In effect, the strength of neoliberalism as a rhetorical force has constrained the options available to policymakers.

**Concepts of neoliberalism.** A core concept of neoliberalism, as a political ideology, is that economic freedom both guarantees and advances political freedom. For example, Friedman argued that, “restrictions on economic freedom inevitably affect



freedom in general, even such areas as freedom of speech and press” (1990, p. 67). The restrictions that Friedman references range from seemingly benign government policies such as taxation to subsidies and these policies directly challenge the freedom of a society. The work of Friedman and others to popularize the ideas incubated at the University of Chicago and before that, the Austrian School of economic thought was exported and actualized into public policy by policy makers like the Chicago Boys in Chile or the Thatcher and Reagan administrations in the United Kingdom and United States respectively. Von Mises, Hayek, and Friedman provide strong arguments for capitalism in the context of the Cold War. Whether or not their theories actually advanced freedom and liberty is debatable. However, there is rhetorical power in the concepts of neoliberalism. The idea of personal choice, removing bureaucratic controls, finding efficiencies, and other neoliberal rhetoric based in the philosophy of Friedman, Hayek, Von Mises and others are a strong force in political and societal discussions.

Friedman (2002) argues that, “the kind of economic organization that provides economic freedom directly, namely, competitive capitalism, also promotes political freedom because it separates economic power from political power and in this way enables the one to offset the other” (p. 9). The link between political freedom and economic freedom, therefore, in Friedman’s framework, is direct. For thinkers like Friedman, it is also logical that any infringement on the freedom of the market is tantamount to restricting political freedoms. In this framework, it is also logical to conclude from this statement that removing controls on the economy and the market would produce greater freedoms for individual nations and ultimately the world. Thus, there is a moral imperative for policies and practices that remove government oversight

or regulation of services or products. This moral argument can then be used to encourage a range of policies such as the dismantling of social services to the adoption of a voucher system for public education. The morality associated with competition, economic efficiency and the private market are firmly entrenched in the discourse around policy discussions. The implication of neoliberalism is important to this study because the assumptions that these foundational concepts of the morality of competition and the immorality of restricting private business bleeds into everyday language. Marginson (2009), while discussing the implication of Hayek on higher education, argues that, “much of the popular appeal of neo-liberalism lies in its potent message about freedom” (p. 86). The argument by Marginson, when considered in the historical context of the struggles of twentieth century against various forms of tyrannical or totalitarian governments, provides a reasonable explanation for the persuasive power of neoliberal ideology.

### **Globalization and Neoliberalism**

In the previous section, I discussed the historical roots and foundational thinkers of neoliberalism, especially within the context of the twentieth century. To further the discussion of the context of neoliberalism, I provide a brief review of globalization to highlight the technological and global political realities of late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. Doing so situates neoliberalism in this context and helps to provide a description of the character of neoliberalism. As discussed earlier, one of the central tenets of neoliberalism is that restrictions on economic freedom are incongruent with personal freedom. This is the moral foundation for neoliberal policies. The belief in unrestricted personal economic freedom can naturally be extended to an international

vision of economic freedom. This section will argue that although there are technological changes in world, such as the telecommunications revolution or the availability of international jet travel, these technical innovations have been developed under the framework of neoliberalism. I will also argue that what has emerged, to a large extent, through the processes of globalization has been an expansion of a particular notion of a market-based consumer existence which is based on the ideas of Barber's (1992) *Jihad vs. McWorld* thesis. Barber's ideas will be discussed later in this section but the primary conclusion that I draw is that neoliberalism is not synonymous with globalization but globalization is not neutral and has largely been co-opted as a project of neoliberalism. One of the obvious outcomes of globalization under neoliberalism has been the rise of a global consumer identity that has eclipsed the traditional notion of a national citizenship and civic life.

**Technological imperatives.** Globalization could not have occurred without the innovations in communications technology and transportation that have largely been developed in the last century (Barber, 1992; Copeland, 1997; Kellner, 2002; Skogstad, 2000; Walker & Fox, 1996). Barber (1998), while explaining his *Jihad vs. McWorld* thesis, posits that:

McWorld represents an American push into the future animated by onrushing economic, technological, and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerize people everywhere with fast music, fast computers, and fast food—MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald's—pressing nations into one homogeneous global culture, one McWorld tied together by communications, information, entertainment, and commerce. (p. 29)

In this passage, Barber argues that there is a specifically American flavour to globalization, but consider exactly what is defined as American in his definition. The American culture that is pressing nations into one homogeneous global culture, as Barber puts it, is not the culture of Walt Whitman, George Washington, or Maya Angelou. Instead, it is American consumer and corporate culture. The consumer culture that Barber refers to could not have been as readily spread without the advent of satellites, televisions, and other technological advances.

The culturally biased effects of technology are why Barber attributes, at least partially, the destruction of the Eastern European communist regimes to the spread of technology. Barber argues that, “with photocopying and then fax machines having infiltrated Soviet universities and samizdat literary circles in the eighties, and computer modems having multiplied like rabbits in communism's bureaucratic warrens thereafter, glasnost could not be far behind” (p. 56). The idea that technological innovation is not culturally neutral is similar to what Skogstad (2000) wrote regarding the force of technology on globalization. Echoing McLuhan’s, the medium is the message thesis (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967), Skogstad claims, “technological change is not a socially neutral process” (p. 580). Like Barber, Skogstad attributes the success of globalization to a combination of technology, politics, cultural changes, and financial agreements. The necessary factor for globalization, however, was the advancement in communications and transportation that allows the political, cultural, and financial aspects of globalization to spread and function.

**Market imperative.** If globalization were a neutral process of engaging most of the world in a global exchange of ideas, culture, and travel, its effects and

implementation would likely go unchallenged except by the most xenophobic forces. However, globalization carries with it a distinct set of economic ideas, as alluded to earlier, that involve potential problematic aspects. For example, Copeland (1997) argued that, “animus of globalization is corporate, its mantra is the market-place, and its creed, adjustment” (p. 19). In other words, the process of globalization is a neoliberal project that carries with it a set of values and ideas that are not politically neutral. This criticism directly confronts the perceived problematic aspects of globalization and the forces and institutions that push the policy and structural changes associated with globalization. The biased nature of globalization is what Barber considers to be the market imperative of globalization. Barber (1992) contends that traditional concepts of national sovereignty in a variety of policy areas, but specifically market regulation and banking policy, become eroded as the force of globalization is exerted through entities like the WTO, World Bank, and other international financial and trade agreements.

The belief in the freedom of capital and trade that these institutions represent and allow for is a direct outgrowth of foundational concepts of neoliberalism as previously discussed. Bourdieu (1998) holds that contemporary society is marked by discourse based in markets and the order of international capitalism. This discourse is composed of the belief that:

the economic world is a pure and perfect order, implacably unrolling the logic of its predictable consequences, and prompt to repress all violations by the sanctions that it inflicts, either automatically or—more unusually—through the intermediary of its armed extensions, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the

policies they impose: reducing labour costs, reducing public expenditures and making work more flexible. (para. 1)

Bourdieu's summary and definition of the ideology of globalization and its connection to neoliberalism is important to understanding the forces animating its growth, apart from the more obvious technical aspects of it. When Hayek (2014) argues that, "if we are not to destroy individual freedom, competition must be left to function unobstructed" (p. 48) there is an obvious logic to this neoliberal argument that, taken to its conclusion, means that this principle of freedom is applicable at the international level. Hayek's logic translates into an advocacy for policies allowing for the free movement of capital, services, and goods.

Bourdieu's definition also highlights a broad criticism of the perceived undemocratic nature of globalization. The implacably unrolling logic of these policies leaves little room for dissent or choice by individual nations. This criticism is echoed in many sources (cf. Barber, 1998; Fairclough, 2003; Kellner, 2002; Negri 2008) and highlights a fundamental paradox of globalization in relation to neoliberal ideology, specifically that neoliberal ideology emphasizes the idea of freedom, whether it be personal or economic freedom. Yet, at the political level and national level, freedom of choice is limited by supranational agreements.

To the point of such agreements, Copeland (1997) argues that there are a distinct constellation of policies and programmes that are imposed on nations who become part of this program of globalization. This group of policies include, "free trade, structural adjustment, market liberalization, and drastic public spending and programme reductions, combined, in the underdeveloped world, with the imposition of policy conditionality and

deep cuts in development assistance” (p. 20). Copeland goes on to explain that because these policies are so closely associated with globalization, it suggests that globalization is not a neutral process. Taken together, these criticisms of globalization connect distinctly to neoliberalism.

**In defense of free-trade and globalization.** Despite the strong criticism of these programmes of globalization discussed by Copeland, Barber, and others, there are equally strong proponents of the policies of market liberalization and deregulation (Baer, 1991; Bhagwati, 2004; Christy, 2008; Fukuyama, 1992, 1995; Larch & Lechthaler, 2011; Legrain, 1999; Yu, 1994). From increasing environmental protections (Yu, 1994), to increased living standards for the citizens of globally integrated nations (Fukuyama, 1995; Larch & Lechthaler, 2011), the proponents of this form of globalization claim that while there can be short term adjustment problems, the net effect of greater integration and access to markets is a better outcome for all. However, there is a definite set of institutions and norms that are implied by the development of this type of integration into a harmonized global marketplace that have to be followed for the system to work.

The undermining of the nation state has produced a great deal of anxiety for many and yet, there is a key paradox to globalization. The paradox, which is remarked on by multiple authors (Barber, 1998; Copeland, 1997; Marginson, 1999; Skogstad, 2000), is that globalization also relies on national governments enforcing the rules of globalization. This can breed a profound resentment within a population that becomes alienated from the policies and functions of their own government as it enforces the rules of a distant, unelected/undemocratic set of agreements. This removal of choice also challenges a potent idea of liberal economic theory that is the primacy of choice and the individual.

**Consumerism.** Beyond this structural connection between globalization and neoliberalism, there is a cultural aspect to globalization that directly relates to neoliberalism. I am referring to the spread of consumerism as a part of the globalization process. This aspect of globalization is remarked on by many critics (Bauman & Donskis, 2016; Baudrillard, 2010; Comor, 1998; Norris, 2011; Marginson, 1999; Ritzer, 1998) but is fundamental to Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* thesis and is directly connected to this study because it speaks to the fundamental transformation of the individual in terms of existence within society and the role of institutions in this reality.

Barber uses the term "McWorld" to describe consumer culture. It should be noted the obvious appropriation of the McDonald's brand "Mc" to describe this global culture of consumerism. This use of an iconic American brand is meant to denote a specific American flavour of this global culture (1998, p. 30). Barber is clear that his understanding of globalized consumer culture is historically rooted in predominantly American brands. It is also clear that Barber views McWorld as an ideological and political movement but one that is vastly different from traditional movements. For lack of a better word, it is "fuzzier," as he describes it, than traditional political ideology and is transmuted into "a kind of videology that works through sound bites and film clips" (1998, p. 31). It is reasonable to update this thesis and include the panoply of digital media and social media to Barber's concept of videology.

This "fuzzy" ideology is similar to what Bauman and Donskis (2016) propose in describing neoliberalism. They claim that neoliberalism and the culture of consumerism it brings with it are different from traditional political ideologies. Bauman and Donskis employ a dialogue to explain their ideas on the phenomenon of neoliberalism and explain



their ideas based in a moral context with this neoliberal culture of consumerism as ‘liquid evil’. Donskis, writing in dialogue with Bauman (Bauman & Donskis, 2016), describes the idea of liquid evil in the following terms:

I would argue that liquid evil, contrary to what we could term ‘solid evil’ – the latter being based on a black-and-white social perspective, in which we can easily identify the resilience of evil in our social and political reality – assumes the appearance of goodness and love. More than that, it parades as a seemingly neutral and impartial acceleration of life – the unprecedented speed of life and social change implying the loss of memory and moral amnesia; in addition, liquid evil walks in disguise as the absence and impossibility of alternatives. A citizen becomes a consumer, and value-neutrality hides the fact of disengagement. (p. 3)

The key to understanding consumerism, globalization, and neoliberalism in the reasoning provided by Bauman and Donskis is that this ideology is effective because it operates in an almost stealthy way. This stealthy nature of ideology is similar to Norris (2011) who points out that despite the various consumer lobbies and chambers of commerce across the globe, there is no consumer party or political leader for consumerism. This is not to say that there are no political parties or thinkers that promote the core concepts of consumerism. However, the functionality of consumer ideology is far more plastic than rigid and this is its strongest aspect.

This liquidity of neoliberalism is precisely the functional power of McWorld for Barber. Barber (1998) argues that the values of consumerism are generally not forced on populations by authoritative governments and institutions. Instead, they “bleed into the culture from such pseudo-cultural products as films and advertising, which feel neither

coercive nor intrusive but are often linked to a world of material goods, fast food, fashion accessories, and entertainment” (p. 31). Considering the accelerating nature of portable technology and the media that is viewed on these devices, the power of consumer culture to change perceptions, expectations, and values is profound and is important to this study. The utility of the McWorld thesis is that Barber highlights how consumer ideology works through society in areas that are not necessarily obvious. By embracing a consumer or market version of existence, society fundamentally changes. It changes because, as Barber points out:

markets preclude ‘we’ thinking and ‘we’ actions, trusting in the power of aggregated individual choices (the famous invisible hand) to somehow secure the common good. Only it does not work that way. The quest by consumers for private satisfaction and of producers for private profit simply does not add up to the satisfaction for citizens of their public interests. (p. 35)

Barber’s argument, when related to the previous section dealing with the foundational philosophy of neoliberalism, is a powerful critique of a market-based society. His essential argument is that a traditional concept of citizenship is incongruent in this version of globalization. This political critique, coupled with his argument of how consumer culture spreads in an almost viral manner, is critical to understanding neoliberalism.

Of course, globalization functions and is enforced through formal political agreements and institutions such as the World Bank or various free-trade agreements. This formal power of neoliberal globalization is undeniable, yet the case being made by Barber is that it is through somewhat covert means that the ideology of globalization

functions. Barber labels this ideology consumerism, but it is part of neoliberalism because it directly relates to the foundational philosophy of neoliberalism as it emphasizes an individualistic universe of the self and the morality of markets. This is similar to what Norris (2011) argues when he defines consumerism as a, “process that expands beyond the purchasing of a product to include the transformation of all things in the world into objects for human consumption” (p. 9). Norris goes on to argue that consumerism becomes the primary mode of existence to the point where President George W. Bush called on Americans to respond to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in a variety of ways but highlighted the need to go out and shop (Bush, 2001). In this example, the idea of citizenship is conflated with the role of a consumer and speaks volumes about the infiltration of this neoliberal identity supplanting traditional notions of nationalism. Instead of asking citizens to enlist in the military, pay a war tax, or be frugal with valuable war materials, in a similar fashion in other wars, President Bush made an argument directly connecting patriotism to conspicuous spending.

### **The Link**

Taken together, the importance of globalization to this study should be evident for the following reasons. First, globalization is a product of technological capabilities but has been shaped as a tool of spreading neoliberal policies. Secondly, globalization involves pushing a particular mode of existence that supplants traditional forms of relating to society. Therefore, globalization is an expression of a particular economic and political viewpoint. It is a neoliberal project and is important to this study because the phenomenon of neoliberalism is global. Marginson discusses globalization in the following terms:

Put simply, globalization is about world systems which have a life of their own that is distinct from local and national life, even while these world systems tend to determine the local and national. This does not mean that the global determines the national and local in a total or one-directional fashion but it has the potential to affect every part of the world, including educational institutions and programmes, and the subjectivities formed in education. There is no longer any part of the world that is immune from global systems. (p. 20)

Marginson's definition is a good summary of globalization as has been discussed previously in this chapter. His definition links potentially abstract international political phenomenon to the functioning of national and local programs like education.

Considering the overall research question of this study which is, "How does neoliberalism affect Canadian universities?", understanding the connection between globalization and neoliberalism is important because it situates neoliberalism as a global phenomenon that is connected to technological, political and economic changes in the world. In the next section of this chapter, I examine the impact of neoliberalism on higher education.

### **Neoliberalism and University Education**

In the previous sections of this chapter, I laid out contesting basic views of society, the roots of neoliberalism, the relationship between globalization and neoliberalism. Building from those discussions, I turn to neoliberalism and its effects on university education. As stated earlier, the intent of this chapter is to provide context for this study and to construct an understanding of the important aspects of neoliberal ideology. In order to discuss neoliberalism's effects on education, I focus on two major

areas of impact. The first is the adoption of a neoliberal management and focus for universities. The second is how neoliberalism changes the character of university education. Given that neoliberalism is an ideological force that functions through consumerism, I pay particular attention to the way that consumerism has potentially changed the relationship between students, faculty, and the universities themselves. It is this ideological functioning that neoliberalism has the potential to be at its most effective rather than just a policy agenda.

**Management and focus.** Neoliberalism must be understood in a broader political and economic context. In the broader political understanding of the effects of neoliberalism, a fixation on privatization and the decrease of public spending is foundational to the rhetoric of markets. Lyall and Sell (2006) speak of this influence of market logic on the way that universities are forced to function. They concentrate on the idea of privatization and suggest that it is best to consider privatization as working along a spectrum. Essentially, their argument is that as universities see public investment and funding disappear, they must resort to increasing the sources and amounts of their private funding. Lyall and Sell report that American public universities have seen public funding decrease from 50 to 30 percent (p. 8). Such a decrease produces pressures on the universities to source funding from private philanthropy and corporations to supplement the shortfall of public funding, creating a dynamic where universities must justify their existence in market terms. Brownlee (2015) gives a similar account of the state of Canadian of university education.

Deiaco, Hughes, and McKelvey (2012) agree with the broad arguments of Lyall and Sell but relate the pressures to adopt private sector management and an increasing

need for corporate funding to a wider and global imperative. Deiaco et al. connect the privatization imperative to an increasingly globalized and marketized understanding of university education and a global pool of potential students. They argue that not only are universities increasingly competing for students, they are also competing for international funding and even for faculty. The idea of international competition for students, funding, and faculty are natural results of incorporating market ideology into all aspects of society and that is a primary idea of neoliberalism. Deiaco et al. speak about the need for universities to act “strategically” (p. 526). In their article, strategic action means the ability for universities to find external funding and to be held accountable by the public. Their understanding of accountability raises questions of in what terms are universities to be held accountable and how can the independent research agendas of academics be resolved against sometimes more economically driven interests of a government and private funding.

Häyrynen-Alestalo and Peltola (2006) in their study of three Finnish universities come to similar conclusions as these other studies. Despite favourable accounts of private/public partnerships in these universities, they argue that there is also ample evidence of difficulties in keeping university governance independent. They claim that there is a significant difficulty under a neoliberal regime in the “capability of producing goods and services that have market value” (p. 255) as some disciplines are well suited toward such goals and others are not. Again, to relate these conclusions of Häyrynen-Alestalo and Peltola back to the foundational ideas of neoliberalism, it is reasonable to orientate the functions of a university to the valuations of the market rather than some other hierarchy. Taken together, these authors and researchers are describing a changing

environment in which universities must operate and justify their services. Part of this justification of the university in a neoliberal context is that it provides education and training for the market and produces tangible benefits for the economy.

**Human capital.** The concept that describes the focus of this kind of economically centered education is the human capital theory of education. Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2006) describe the historical development of the shift towards a human capital view of education in the following terms:

Democratic learning, or education that encourages the meaningful political participation of citizens in public policy development, also came under attack as labour market needs began to define acceptable and valued schooling objectives. Schools were increasingly viewed as production facilities whose primary mission was providing industry with its required human capital. The role of the citizen within this milieu became one of political conformity rather than political engagement since the neo-liberal social structure was dictated almost entirely by market logic. (p. 2)

Within this description provided by Hyslop-Margison and Sears, the argument is that there is a distinction between a classical democratic education that focuses on the development of citizens and a market-orientated view of education where individuals and their education are valued only for their potential contribution to the economy. The difference between a democratic education and an education based in economic productivity is similar to the distinction that was made earlier in this chapter between an emancipatory education and an education based in neoliberal principles.

Politically, the rhetoric of human capital theory can be quite successful because, as Ayers (2005) points out:

The line of reasoning here is that the allocation of taxpayer dollars toward developing human capital results in higher levels of productivity, greater profits for private enterprise, and, thus, economic growth. This economic growth is said to yield higher levels of employment and eventually an improved quality of life for all. (p. 533)

Ayers' highlights a view of education that is politically useful in a political culture dominated by neoliberal principles. Even though, as Ayers points out and is discussed by other authors such as Barr (2011), Marginson (2016), Walters (2004), the effectiveness of policies developed around the human capital thesis is mixed. However, the rhetoric of human capital theory is politically convincing. In short, the argument that universities and institutions of learning should produce economic goods for a society can be extremely powerful in comparison to the slightly more ethereal ideas of citizenship and intellectual curiosity. Suspitsyna (2012) claims that, "the contemporary discourse on higher education tends to give more prominence to universities' participation in the economy than to their role in society" (p. 50), and this is borne out in much of the literature on universities. For instance, this focus on the economic impact of universities might help explain why a public intellectual like Cornel West (2005), would describe his brief time at Harvard University and his public row with the then president of Harvard as a clash between a technocratic and a democratic vision for intellectual life. West's anecdotal example highlights the focus of managing a university like a public corporation and how that pursuit may become antithetical to other visions of the university.



**Research focus.** The strategic choices, that Deiano et al. claim that universities and university management have to make, often involve the potential for private partnerships. For instance, in a report published in 2012 by the Science Innovation Board, a company that connects European education institutes with companies, entitled *Making Industry-University Partnerships Work: Lessons From Successful Collaborations*, the importance, and nature of industrial relationships to higher education is laid out clearly. It states that, “government policy should reward, or at least not discourage, universities and companies that form strong partnerships” and that “university presidents need to make industry-university partnerships a strategic priority and communicate the message regularly to the entire academic community” (Edmonson, Valigra, Kenward, Hudson, & Belfield, 2008, pp. 3,8). While there is the caveat that this type of academic/industry relationship must also preserve academic and pure research goals, it is evident that this report is meant to argue that industry should be intimately involved in the research activities of the university. This report, as stated before, was produced by a company whose intent is to promote these relationships, there is a growing body of literature that points out the connection between reduced public expenditure on universities and the supplementation of lost funds through private sector partnerships.

In this vein, The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2016) publishes their recommendations for the global science, technology and innovation sectors on a biennial basis. In this report that is aimed at informing and guiding policy makers and analysts, the concept of using private donors and corporate sources for research funds is a core recommendation of their 2016 document. They argue that deep changes in academic culture and a focus on private donors and philanthropists

is necessary to both cope with technological changes and deal with an ever-shrinking pool of public funding from government (OECD, 2016, p. 18). These changes that the OECD recommends in the way in which academic research is conducted follow the core ideas of neoliberalism in at least two ways. The first is clear, in that the acceptance of a reduced funding stream from public sources is a direct consequence of the broader neoliberal goal of all but eliminating public funding for anything but the most essential functions of government. The second is less obvious and involves a deep distrust of institutions with bureaucratic controls. The report argues that changes in the culture of academia are needed to allow for individual innovation and to meet the speed of innovation. The concept of reducing the impediments or controls on individuals is a part of neoliberal ideology. It is an ideology of individuals and this is somewhat at odds with the traditions of academia where the concept of being a part of a society of academics that govern each other and help critically and methodically evaluate the work produced is deeply engrained. Universities are often hierarchical with boards of governors, deans, and other mechanisms that govern the actions of this subset of society. Again, this is at odds with the free flowing market where anyone, in theory, can become a vendor, or a buyer and consumption is based on customer preference.

Indeed, proponents of fostering and solidifying the connections between the private sector and higher education argue that embracing industry is a necessity that will modernize and positively reform the role of universities in society. For instance, while discussing the Australian university system, Lindsay and Neumann (1987) caution against focusing exclusively on useful research instead of the less tangible goals of theoretical and pure research but are also clear that including private industry into the

research goals of a university is a necessary and positive approach to funding shortfalls and the overall role of the university. They argue that focusing on useful research and the economic impact of research is an unexceptional policy goal. Moreover, this new focus for research will help sweep away the “vestigial remnants of ivory-tower isolationism inherited from the British university model” (p. 443). In short, Lindsay and Neumann embrace the potential change in the culture, purpose, and functioning of universities by adopting market ideals and inviting private industry into the research goals of the university.

Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) use the example of the “Missyplicity Project” to demonstrate the intimate connection between the private sector and the university. They describe the Missyplicity Project as an attempt by John Sperling, coincidentally the founder of the private for-profit University of Phoenix, to develop a canine cloning program by financing a research project at Texas A&M University (TAMU). Sperling formed a private corporation for the express purpose of funding the research, while university professors at TAMU carried out the actual research (Slaughter & Rhoades, p. 6). The Missyplicity Project is a singular example of an extremely wealthy individual funding research for his private interests—cloning his dog Missy—and it should be noted that the intent was also to develop a process that could eventually be sold in the private market. Thus, it was an individual’s research project done for private purposes and with intent to develop a new industry. Sperling was able to co-opt and direct the research of a university solely for his personal interests, and while the example is perhaps an aberration, it is consistent with the changes I am describing insofar as it points to the power of private interests in determining research goals by controlling the funding.

The direct involvement in the direction and application of research by private organizations is by no means limited to the demands of multi-millionaire businessmen. One example of this public-private relation comes from the controversial F-35 fighter program in Canada. This particular example shows the multi-dimensional implications of a private/public relationship. As a part of Lockheed Martin's public relations campaign to sell their aircraft to skeptical Canadian citizens, it created a website, [www.F-35.com](http://www.F-35.com), with a section devoted to Canada. The now defunct website, which had images of the aircraft, various laudatory literature, multimedia featuring the F-35, and even a petition to support the adoption of the F-35 as the replacement fighter for the Royal Canadian Air Force, also featured a section which describes how the aircraft would have components made by Canadian companies. One of these partners featured on the developer's list was the Anti-Icing Materials International Laboratory that is associated with the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi (Lockheed Martin, n.d.). The F-35 project represents the blending of the research capabilities of the university, the direct application to the private sector, all while being subsidized by the government in both the product itself and the research being done to create the product, not to mention the implication of the military industrial complex into academia. Thus, there is a circle of logic that creates the argument for government interceding in the development of products, i.e. the defense of the nation, and the threat of lost revenue if the government does not support the F-35. Lockheed Martin's strategy of triangulating public support for the F-35 project in Canada demonstrates the inherent neoliberal logic of such private/public partnerships. Universities receive new sources of funding for research, and private corporations receive access to cutting edge publically supported researchers and facilities.

Most universities have departments dedicated to facilitating corporate partnerships in the field of research. For example, the University of California, Davis, has an Office of Corporate Relations (OCR) that is part of the university's Office of Research. In this example, this office advertises its role by stating that "the mission of OCR is to develop, foster and manage strategic relationships with industry in a comprehensive manner that spans multiple interests across academic disciplines" (UC, Davis, Office of Research, n.d.). UC Davis, is by no means exceptional in this respect and this type of active partnering with the private sector is certainly seen in Canada. For instance, as part of the Office of Research at Lakehead University, there is a commitment to industry partnerships. The Economic Development Services state its mission is to, "contribute to and support the social and economic prosperity of Northern Ontario and Simcoe County communities through research, education, knowledge transfer, the training of highly-qualified personnel, commercialization, and Centres of Excellence" (Lakehead University, n.d.). Furthermore, Lakehead University's *Strategic Plan 2010-2013* incorporates the concept of changing academic culture as argued in the OECD report discussed earlier. The plan states that:

faculty must be provided with additional education relating to the value of technology transfer to the University, particularly what technology transfer means, how it benefits research, and the capacity of the Innovation Management Office to assist faculty with patents, copyrights, partnerships, and commercialization of research results. (2009, p. 24)

This document is intended to provide an overall vision for the university and outlines the areas of improvement for the institution. In this section dealing with the university's

research goals, the objective is to encourage collaborations between faculty and industry for many reasons, including, the perceived reputation of the university. Clearly, when this document was drafted and later approved by Lakehead's Senate and Board of Governors, there was a belief that the faculty of the university needed further education on how to make its research commercially relevant.

Both of these examples serve to demonstrate a will on the part of universities themselves to invite an ever more intimate connection between the research objectives of the university and those of the private sector. To be clear, the idea of fostering industry partnerships with university research functions rests on the idea, as Altbach (2011) states: "of using university resources, both intellectual and physical, to develop and commoditize intellectual work" (p. 71). Therefore, a potential criticism of these programs is that this use of public institutions to develop commodities amounts to a form of corporate welfare despite the funds gained by universities for this research. There are also concerns that these types of commercial relationships will alter the focus of university research and divert funds from basic scientific research that is both essential to a better understanding of the universe but is not necessarily commercially useful (Scott, 2006, p. 30).

In Slaughter and Rhoades' (2004) *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*, the authors speak to this broad shift in how universities place themselves in a changing economic and political reality. They explain that universities engage in some of the enterprises as previously exemplified by the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi, Lakehead University, the University of California, and Texas A&M, as a way of adapting

to the new economy, that is, a neoliberal economy, and trying to maximize potential resources. They argue that:

Colleges and universities are not seeking to become private enterprises; rather they wish to maintain the privileges of not-for-profit status while at the same time entering the private-sector marketplace. Academic capitalism does not involve 'privatization': rather it entails a redefinition of public space and appropriate activity in that space. (p. 306)

This redefinition is encouraged by the scarcity of public funds and the rhetoric of developing efficiencies. The thesis that Slaughter and Rhoades develop throughout this work describes many of the changes already discussed in this chapter in terms of a broader struggle for the definition of public goods and public institutions in a neoliberal era. Indeed, the outreach to corporate and private industry for funding of research programs is completely logical and understandable but it does fundamentally question the notions of academic integrity and independence that many of the critics of these programs bring up.

Critics such as Smyth and Hattam (2000) argue that once a university begins to position itself as a knowledge production facility in a knowledge economy, the role of academics is fundamentally altered. The term that Smyth and Hattam use to describe this change in academia is "hustler." Their thesis is that, "it seems to be the case in the marketised university that the pressure is on for those of us in universities to hustle knowledge as a commodity, with the result that our voice is treated as yet another commodity" (p. 171). They consider this new role and the change from academic to hustler as a loss of freedom for intellectuals and a way of incorporating their work into

the economic work of government. In the examples from both Slaughter and Rhoades and Smyth and Hattam, the issue that both sets of authors discuss is the changing definition of what academic research is meant to achieve. The language of corporations and the private sector influence the debate and work towards the inevitability of policies that will then favour changes in the way universities define their role in society. For both proponents and critics of the increased role of industry in universities, there is a pronounced change and universities are increasingly looking for industrial partnerships to supplement their research agendas.

One possible consequence that may not even be a conscious decision, but a consequence of adopting a business like attitude towards research, is that universities will only support research and knowledge that can be quantified. Roberts (2007) discusses this possible implication of performance-based metrics on research goals in New Zealand. Specifically Roberts examines the impact of New Zealand's Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF). Roberts argues that due, not only to the PBRF but also the larger trends of neoliberalism, outcome based research ideals are threatening the intrinsic curiosity and research goals of academics. Roberts concludes that as researchers are increasingly driven by performative model of research, knowledge becomes transformed into a standardized form that allows it to be traded in a competitive market. This means that,

Knowledge that cannot be standardized in this manner has no use value in a system driven by performativity and commercial imperatives and is rendered irrelevant for funding purposes. Standardization allows cleaner, clearer distinctions to be drawn—and defended—between those who are performing and



those who are not. It encourages all to play the same language game and makes it easier to bring in new players. Indeed, knowledge is, in some respects, incidental to the process. (p. 358)

Consequently, the role of universities and academics is curtailed and limited to research that can find utility in the marketplace.

Summing up the lessons learned from industrial partnerships in the United States, Bok (2015) claims that there have been both positive and negative effects. Bok attributes the potential pitfalls of industrial partnerships to the strength or weakness of the university to control, inform, and safeguard its faculty and research programs from potential conflicts of interest and undue influence of industry on the research agenda of the university. Bok concludes that universities have, “yet to do all they should to protect the values essential to the continued integrity of academic research” (p. 257). Given the effects of a neoliberal climate of a reduced role of government in providing funding and research grants that Bok also discusses, the danger is that the pressure for funds will overpower the values of academia and the independence of universities in pursuit of research goals.

**Neoliberalism and professors.** In the previous section, a brief examination of the potential influence of private interests on the research functions of universities was provided. In it, the argument was simply that in the context of neoliberalism, universities have been pressured to develop partnerships with industry and corporations. These partnerships may take different forms and can produce both increased capital for the universities and can help private industry develop new technologies and products. This is a somewhat obvious effect of neoliberalism on the academy as it can be observed in

initiatives like the Economic Development Services at Lakehead University or the Office of Corporate Relations at the UC Davis. Universities require new sources of funding in an era of increased austerity from government sources in all sectors (Brown, 2006, p. 698) and development of these industrial partnerships in such a reality may seem like a rational and sound response despite the potential changes these types of arrangements may produce.

However, a potential source of change in the nature of higher education is the effect of neoliberalism on the valuation and relationship of students to education and to university educators. In order to effectively explain this concept, I refer back to Barber. In his work *Jihad vs. McWorld* (2001), Barber discusses the impact of McWorld, his terminology for a market-driven consumer lifestyle, on education. Speaking of spirit and the goal of education at-large and not universities in particular, Barber argues that:

To grow into our mature better selves, we need the help of our nascent better selves, which is what common standards, authoritative education, and a sense of the public good can offer. Consumption takes us as it finds us, the more impulsive and greedy, the better. Education challenges our impulses and informs our greediness with lessons drawn from our mutuality and the higher goods we share in our communities of hope. Government, federal and local, with responsibility for public education once took it upon itself (back when “itself” was “us”) to even up the market and lend a hand to our better selves. Now via vouchers the market threatens to get even with public education. This sorry state of affairs is not the work of villains or boors. It arises all too naturally out of the culture of McWorld

in a transnational era where governments no longer act to conceive or defend the common good. (p. 117)

In this passage, Barber distinguishes between the limitations of a consumer lifestyle as opposed to the more challenging role of citizen, or at least one in the making, and the distinction is focused on either appealing to baser instincts or striving to overcome them. However, as society becomes more and more influenced by neoliberal values, the result might produce a general public that identifies more as a consumer than as a citizen. This is the point that Barber makes and it is interesting that he does not ascribe this problem to villains or boors but to the culture of McWorld. Barber's critique of how McWorld interferes with education is similar to Plato's discussion of the development of oligarchies, "from there they progress in money-making, and the more honorable they consider it, the less honorable they consider virtue. Or isn't virtue in tension with wealth, as though each were lying in the scale of a balance, always inclining in opposite directions" (Book VII, 550e, Bloom 1991). The similarity between Plato and Barber views is that the pursuit of material wealth will stealthily reorder the values of a society. In the case of Plato's *Republic*, the shift occurs as money-making and wealth become seen as more honourable and traditional ideals of virtue become less valued as a consequence. Yet, there is not necessarily a conscious decision to abandon virtue, it happens gradually and for the most part, at the unconscious level. It is important to understand this argument because it suggests that changes in the fundamental principles of society can unthinkingly occur. Certain values can take precedence, not at once, but gradually as other values are simply forgotten and a new normal is established. This stealthy notion of how neoliberalism functions will be further explored in the following

section of this chapter but, it is an important notion that neoliberalism or McWorld, as Barber describes it, works in mainly amorphous ways and with government acquiescence to the dominant ideology, even if the results are concrete.

In the case of university education and the role of both professors and students, a potentially new and challenging dynamic can occur in light of valuating the functions of institutions in largely market-based terms. Drawing on Barber's work, Ritzer (1998) suggests that the university can be understood in terms of educational consumption and this "allows students to consume educational services and eventually to obtain important 'goods'—degrees and credentials" (p. 151). This is a radical notion for the conception of education as it reduces the role of universities to an economic transaction between the student and the institution. It changes the role of the professor to that of a service provider with the same customer service expectations that would be expected in any other consumer interaction. Indeed, keeping in mind the large amounts paid for tuition, textbooks, and on-campus housing, a university education is reduced to a mere market transaction, and a student could reasonably expect a corresponding level of customer service for such a large purchase.

Ritzer (1998) argues that this change in the fundamental conception of the student and what it is they are pursuing in higher education will have a number of consequences. Amongst these consequences include universities making it easier for students to access educational services. This involves the creation of satellite campuses, in a similar fashion as the franchising of fast-food restaurants, essentially meaning that the university goes to the students rather than the other way around. This could help explain the rise of online only private universities such as the University of Phoenix, which specializes in the

production of qualifications for its students to increase their chances of employment and to give their students the qualifications necessary to advance in their careers (University of Phoenix Homepage, n.d.). Part of the appeal of this university is that it is convenient to study and obtain degrees without having to sacrifice time in a classroom and apparently this model of education can be lucrative. The Apollo Group, which is the parent corporation of the University of Phoenix, is a publically traded corporation that claimed 4.3 billion dollars' worth of revenue (Apollo Group Corporation, 2012). Ritzer theorized that universities would increasingly adopt a business style expansion model that catered to customer preferences and the Apollo Group has found this to be a sound business model.

Writing before the expansion of the Internet into all aspects of daily life, Ritzer claimed that universities adopting what he calls the McUniversity ideal will continually search for technological solutions to physically attending a lecture and the adoption of customer service style ideas to attract and retain students. Ritzer summarizes this idea by referencing Jean Baudrillard stating that:

Perhaps no term captures the nature of the universities of the future better than "implosion". Today's universities will be imploding into the locations of their satellites, the media (especially television), the computer and cyberspace, entertainment, consumption, and so on. In fact, they are imploding into so many things and so extensively that one is left to wonder: what, if anything, will be left? The image that comes to mind is a Baudrillardian black hole where it is hard to distinguish the university from everything else. (p. 161)

The implosion that Ritzer describes is similar to the conclusions that Barber makes with his *Jihad vs. McWorld* thesis. Essentially, as the ideas of consumerism, market logic, and neoliberalism in general will take hold of the public discourse, the institutions of society will adapt and adopt these same concepts. The idea of an implosion of technological and ideological forces produces a reality that is dominated by an idea of existence that is sometimes difficult to define. There is a stealthy element to this implosion that can easily hide the effects and the implications.

Marginson (2009) holds a similar view as Ritzer when describing the effects of neoliberalism on academic life in the university. Marginson's argument is that the imaginative space that academics exist in becomes curtailed. Specifically, he states that:

Neo-liberal practices constitute more than the suppression of persons or opportunities. The neo-liberal positioning of human subjects not only offers benefits to those subjects privileged by it; successful entrepreneurs, senior managers in universities and so on; it provides all human subjects with forms of positive action. Much of the popular appeal of neo-liberalism lies in its potent message about freedom. The argument in this paper is not that neo-liberalism suppresses academic freedoms, but that it channels and limits academic freedoms. We are not robbed of agency per se, but we are robbed of certain forms of agency vital to us. (p. 87)

This channelling of academic freedom might be expressed, as discussed earlier, into research with commercial viability, it might encourage universities to market their services in corporate language, and it might even change the way that the professor student relationship is conceived. Marginson's (2009) argument is that neoliberalism is

effective, not by overt control but by the limiting effects on academics, going on to state that academic life is, “tamed and more closely harnessed to economic interest and state control and hence to a particular kind of social order. Its larger imaginative horizons are folded into limited reflexivities” (p. 87). In the case of the relationship between professors and students, Margison’s logic can lead to a more market-based relationship that favours a limited role for both professors who become service providers and students who become consumers.

Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, and Reinhardt (2010) help provide some experimental evidence to support the arguments that Ritzer and Marginson propose to explain how neoliberalism alters the functions and relationships of professors to students. Their study employed a phenomenological approach to examine the beliefs of Millennial students as they related to entitlement. The study of entitlement is founded on the idea that students may conceive of themselves as consumers of education. This relates to what has previously been discussed because if universities are just another commercial institution, then there is an expectation to be able to purchase a desired outcome just like any other product. Singleton-Jackson et al. (2010) define the sense of entitlement caused by this consumer version of education is “that on some level students believe they are entitled to, or are, deserving of certain goods and services to be provided by their institutions and professors, something that is outside of the students’ actual performance or responsibilities inside the classroom” (p. 344). Indeed, Singleton-Jackson et al. (2010) go on to argue that a cognitive shift needs to occur within students when they pursue a university education. The student needs to shift from the role as a consumer to the role of a scholar. If this does not occur, “the entitled student, created by higher education as a

business, emerges” (p. 348). In their study, the consequences of the failure to shift from a consumer existence to a scholarly one is felt in a number of different ways. Most pertinent of these consequences to this study involve students believing that attendance and completing the readings, regardless of performance on tests or assignments, should result in a passing grade. This belief is intensified if there are consequences to a lower or failing mark such as the loss of a scholarship or failing a program. The authors of this study remain optimistic about the future of university education despite their findings, but they do argue that university educators will have to produce a blend of “achievement and entitlement that will result in a cooperative and productive learning environment where both the purchasers and purveyors of education can find mutual satisfaction in their endeavors” (p. 357). Despite the conclusion, this optimism betrays an acceptance of a neoliberal order that is so deeply embedded in the beliefs of students that not even an institution as historically strong as a university can break it.

**Student-consumers.** Brownlee (2015) describes this category of learner as student-consumers. Building on the work of Singleton-Jackson et al. (2010) Brownlee argues that these student-consumers have changed the entire pedagogical relationship between students and professors whether they intend to or not. He claims that higher education is increasingly becoming a:

passive commercial transaction, rather than an active process of mutual engagement between student and professor. In the corporatized university, learning has been refashioned as a service encounter. Many students have adopted a sort of “degree-purchasing” orientation, where educational credentials are



viewed as purchasable commodities and learning is evaluated according to external motivations and rewards. (p. 81)

This is an important critique of the contemporary academic climate because Brownlee relates the logical consequences of a market-dominated society where every relationship has been turned into a commodity.

Brownlee's definition of student-consumers is similar to what Delucchi and Smith (1997) reflect on the idea of student-consumers and regard it as being a product, at least partially of, an implosion of boundaries, that Ritzer (1998) references, and performativity. Delucchi and Smith argue that, "American consumer culture is most disruptive to undergraduate education. In the postmodern world, 'performativity' is the most powerful criterion for determining worth, replacing agreed upon, rational, modernist criteria for merit" (p. 323). Performativity, in the sense used by Delucchi and Smith refers to employing a model economic efficiency as the yardstick of success in teaching. They go on to argue that in this reality "efficiency and effectiveness become the exclusive criteria for judging knowledge and its worth in society and within the academy"(p. 323).

Of course, in many countries, students have paid for their university education for many years but "this economic exchange was secondary to their identity on campus as learners" (Saunders, 2010, p. 62). This is a marked difference in the role of a student as there are responsibilities and important tasks that need to be engaged in to overcome ignorance about the subject matter being studied. The activity of education is an ongoing process, a dynamic process that asks for a continuous amount of work from both the student and the educator. Instead, neoliberalism, distills the relationship to a pure

economic exchange requiring very little of the student beyond paying for tuition and attending classes.

Newson (2004) argues that the result of this change in the dynamic between educators and students has led to profound cultural shift in the academy. This shift is dissolving the separation of the world of business with that of education. This means that universities have accepted the language, ideas, and focus of business. Further, Newson claims that, “many educators have begun to accept as foci of their own professional practices: namely, the values of productivity, cost-efficiency and accountability” (p. 233). These values are expressed in a variety of different ways and can range from a seemingly common sense adoption of a variety of technological aids to the pressure of being constantly available to students either in person or virtually, to a fear of not giving students the grades they desire even if the work is lacking. The cultural shift in the university that Newson describes is profound because it changes the very nature of a university education. The pressures that neoliberalism places on the students, the university management, and the faculty, have a plethora of possible outcomes. The key effect for this study is the idea that as neoliberalism infiltrates the university system, in a largely stealthy way, the roles of students, management, and faculty become altered and narrowed. This is not to say that there ever was a golden age of university education but it does suggest that the future will gravitate towards this new market-based education.

**Consequences.** The potential consequences of the shift to a customer based system of selling university education as any other commodity is highlighted by Giroux (1999) when discussing what he describes as the vocationalizing of higher education. Giroux argues that neoliberalism instrumentalizes, a view shared by Hylsop-Margisson

and Sears (2006), as well as Brown (2006), not only the purpose of higher education but the possibilities of the individual student. This instrumentalization is much like the criticism raised by Brownlee (2015) and Marginson (2006) that neoliberalism serves to restrict the possible modes of existence for people. Giroux (1999) characterizes this restriction by stating that:

As the rise of corporate culture reasserts the primacy of privatization and individualism, there is an increasing call for people to surrender or narrow their capacities for engaged politics for a market-based notion of identity, one that suggests relinquishing our roles as social subjects for the limited role of consuming subjects. Similarly, as corporate culture extends ever deeper into the basic institutions of civil and political society, there is a simultaneous diminishing of non-commodified public spheres—those institutions engaged dialogue, education, and learning that address the relationship of the self to public life, social responsibility to the broader demands of citizenship, and the development of public spheres that invest public culture with vibrancy. (p. 150-51)

This criticism by Giroux summarizes the possible problematic nature of neoliberalism in the academy. Giroux's criticisms relate the broad societal changes brought about by an increasing acceptance of neoliberal values and the challenge that these pose to the institutions of civic life. Indeed, Giroux's criticism of neoliberalism is that it erodes the very concept of the public sphere and what it is to be a citizen. The question of what is to be done in a society and public heavily influenced by neoliberalism is addressed by researchers such as Wellen (2005) and Barr (2011) who both attempt to use market-based ideas to best communicate to a consumer student population. This study will not attempt

to offer many strategies but it does work from the premise that neoliberalism is a reality that affects the very way that university education is conceived. The next section focuses explicitly on the marketing and rhetorical work of neoliberalism in establishing a dominant discourse within society.

### **Advertising as Neoliberalism**

In the previous sections of this chapter, I presented differing views on the purpose of education, the importance and development of neoliberalism, and neoliberalism's influence on education and society. I now turn to the role of advertising in a neoliberal society. This turn helps to contextualize the portion of this study that looks at how universities market themselves on their recruitment websites. A key aspect of neoliberalism is the rise of the consumer as the primary mode of existence. This concept was explored earlier in this chapter, and the consequences of consumerism have also been explored, especially in relation to education. Norris (2005), provides a summary of the implications of living in a consumer society by stating that:

Consumption has become our primary language, literacy the interpretation of commercial symbols, and the act of consumption our primary mode of insertion into the world and experience of participation in something beyond ourselves. We internalize the act of purchasing and translate this experience onto all other human activities and aspects of our social existence. (para. 3)

In this passage, Norris summarizes the foundational importance of understanding consumerism in order to understand the functions of society. Consumerism not only defines the individual but it also, as Norris argues, translates into every aspect of life. Therefore, in this framework, there is a direct connection between the rise of a consumer

society and the resulting importance of advertising as the way in which institutions communicate and define themselves in a consumer society.

**The system of objects.** Baudrillard (2005) attempts to provide a critique of consumer society by examining the role of commodities, or, as the title suggests, objects and their meanings. Baudrillard provides this study with a connection between advertising and meaning. The connection between advertising and meaning is important to establish when discussing the impact of the university recruitment websites. The meaning for objects and products, as Baudrillard argues, is produced through advertising. He states that, “we consume the product through the product itself, but we consume its meaning through advertising” (p. 197). To illustrate what he means by this, Baudrillard asks the reader to imagine that he or she awakens to a city stripped of all the signs and advertisements we are used to and instead there is just a single word GARAP appearing everywhere, written on every wall.

GARAP, of course, means nothing in the sense that it is not a proper noun or a reference to anything else. GARAP signifies only itself and in such a scenario, Baudrillard believes that:

By virtue of its very lack of significance it mobilizes an entire imaginary collectivity. It comes to stand for a whole society. In a way people end up “believing” in GARAP. They consider it the mark of advertising’s omnipotence, and judge that if only GARAP would assume the specificity of a product, then that product would meet with an immediate and sweeping success. (p. 198)

However, Baudrillard disputes the idea that if only GARAP would signify something real or something tangible, it would be a success as a marketing campaign. It is precisely the

fact that GARAP is a pure sign that gives it strength. That realization is the ultimate point Baudrillard tries to make. As he states, “advertising’s true referent is here apparent in its purest form: like GARAP, advertising is mass society itself, using systemic, arbitrary signs to arouse emotions and mobilize consciousness, and reconstituting its collective nature in this very process” (p. 198). He goes on to explain, “advertising is a plebiscite whereby mass consumer society wages a perpetual campaign of self-endorsement” (p. 198). The very fact that educational institutions engage in advertising campaigns wherein the education they provide is sold as would be any other service or product makes a statement far larger than the actual content of the advertising. It is a statement of endorsement of what Baudrillard calls the mass consumer society because it uses the same language of advertising to communicate the function of its services in society. Such use of the language of advertising is why it is important to study the way that institutions play into and condone the culture around them through participating in the language of consumerism. Taken further, the implication of Baudrillard’s interpretation is that, as Gilbert (1992) points out, “advertising and product image themselves become goods consumed for their own sake and are no longer simply representations of ‘real’ products” (p. 59). Thus, as consumer culture becomes ever more dominant, the advertising itself eclipses the functional purpose of the product and the signs and codes of advertisement become the fundamental dynamic of society.

The observation that education is marketed as a product changes its nature and makes it a sign or code to be bought on the merits of the advertising alone rather than the actual product (if education can be described as a product) being sold. As Baudrillard claims:

Festival, immanence, positivity – to use such terms amounts to saying that in the first instance advertising is itself less a determinant of consumption than object of consumption. What would an object be today if it were not put on offer both in the mode of discourse and image (advertising) and in the mode of a range of models (choice)? It would be psychologically nonexistent. And what would modern citizens be if objects and products were not proposed to them in the twin dimensions of advertising and choice? They would not be free. (p. 189)

In this view of consumption, advertising is necessary to a consumer society's very existence and the concept of itself. Society, as it currently functions, cannot be understood without advertising and conversely an institution within it is required to advertise as if promoting a consumer product for it to be understood in this society. Without advertising, universities would be unintelligible to society. By engaging in this language of advertising, the education that universities provide is transformed into a consumer good.

The consumer realm erodes and then eliminates the public realm and replaces it with the private. Bauman and Donskis (2016), who present their work in the form of a dialogue, describe as much in their discussion of how the public is replaced with the private as the basis of their work on neoliberalism. Their concept of liquid evil is explained in the following terms,

I would argue that liquid evil, contrary to what we could term “solid evil”– the latter being based on a black-and-white social perspective, in which we can easily identify the resilience of evil in our social and political reality–assumes the appearance of goodness and love. More than that, it parades as a seemingly

neutral and impartial acceleration of life – the unprecedented speed of life and social change implying the loss of memory and moral amnesia; in addition, liquid evil walks in disguise as the absence and impossibility of alternatives. A citizen becomes a consumer, and value-neutrality hides the fact of disengagement. (p. 3)

Bauman and Donskis' depiction of neoliberalism encapsulates a feature of neoliberal ideology. It has the insidious quality of becoming not only the dominant option but also the only option. In other political ideologies, the use of propaganda to push ideas onto an unwilling or, at least, the sceptical populace, would have been paramount. Neoliberalism does not need to be so obvious; the billboards, logos, and jingles that overwhelm the quotidian activities of daily life are far harder to extract from society than are more overt political signs.

Moreover, as Baumaun and Donskis argue, this continuous assault into the thought processes forces a sense of:

individual helplessness and forsakenness, coupled with the state's denial and refusal of its responsibility for education and culture, go along with the heavenly marriage of neoliberalism and state bureaucracy, both of them insisting on the individual's responsibility not only for their life and choices in a free-choice-free world, but for the state of global affairs as well. (p. 3)

Neoliberalism forces individuals to believe in their own complicity in the state of affairs, not only in their own life, but also for all of society and the world. In Bauman and Donskis' view, neoliberalism immerses the individual into the tainted water of a system they are participants in whether willing or not.



**TINA.** Bauman and Donskis (2016) refer to the entrenched ideology of neoliberalism as TINA. TINA is an acronym of “there is no alternative” and Bauman, in their work Bauman and Donskis, argue, much in the same way but from a far more pessimistic perspective as Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) thesis, that TINA existed before the end of the Cold War but was made into the dominant mode of thinking following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Bauman and Donskis’ argue that,

The cracking and dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the twenty-fifth anniversary of which we’ve not long ago celebrated (that is, if one still remembers that celebratory hype—the liquid modern memory span is shrinking fast), hammered home the blending of the locally fixed spectres of TINA – “There Is No Alternative”—into a global one. (p. 13)

The implications of TINA serve to illustrate the mental limitations that neoliberalism places on much of the world. Neoliberalism works best by constraining options rather than acting in overt and obvious ways. Neoliberalism is convincing because it conquers the mental landscapes of individuals and thus limiting the choices for society. The case that Bauman and Donskis (2016) make is that market logic replaces and overcomes all other sources of identity. Everything, as Bauman and Donskis (2016) note, becomes commoditized and identity ceases to be a citizen, or even a human, but the consumer. All activities, all values are replaced by this identity. Essentially, this is the idea of implosion previously discussed in this chapter brought up by Ritzer (1998) and echoed by Bloland (1995) which is the idea that there is no outside of consumer life. Advertising is not communicating the benefits of a product or service; it is the product and is indistinguishable from other aspects of a consumer lifestyle.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provided a background for my research in a number of ways. Firstly, this chapter discussed the philosophical underpinnings of neoliberalism. It provided a historical background for both neoliberalism and the influence of outside forces on the university system in Canada. I began the chapter by providing a discussion of two broad schools of thought as they relate to the purpose of education. These two schools of thought included the market-based purpose for education and the emancipatory ideal. I then moved onto providing a brief history of the roots of neoliberalism including key theorists, key concepts and the link between neoliberalism and globalization. I touched on the importance of the concept of consumerism as it relates to neoliberalism and globalization before moving onto discussing the effects of neoliberalism on universities. I noted the possible managerial and research implications as well as the basic relationship between students and their education. Finally, I discussed the necessity of advertising to provide meaning in a consumer society.

This chapter helps situate this study in the literature on neoliberalism and provides the study with a broader reach than solely discussing universities and neoliberalism. The effects of neoliberal ideology throughout society are shown to be profound in this chapter. Specifically, the potential effect of neoliberal rhetoric being a dominant political discourse that is largely unnoticed. Given that the primary research question of this study is, “In what ways does neoliberalism influence Canadian universities?”, this chapter has helped to provide a background on neoliberalism and situate this study within a broader theoretical and philosophical debate. The following chapter will build from this footing

and delve into the research methodologies and methods for the website analysis and interview portions of this study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter discusses the methodologies and methods used in this study. The previous chapter provided the context in which this study is situated. It took into account a variety of different examples of how neoliberalism, in a broadly understood fashion, has affected different institutions throughout society to the relationship between neoliberalism and higher education. The work of Barber (1992, 1998, 2001) and Harvey (2005) showed how consumer society threatens the traditional notions of citizenship and the traditional functioning of societal institutions. The work of Brownlee (2015), Côté and Allahar (2011), Norris (2011), and Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) demonstrate how the ideas of consumerism and neoliberalism shape the realm of education. Further, the studies by Anctil (2008), Ayers (2005), Fairclough (1993), Germic (2009), Giroux (1999), Marginson (2009), Newson (2004), Saichaie (2011), Saunders (2010), and Singleton-Jackson et al. (2010) all demonstrate the feasibility of studying the impact of neoliberalism on the academy. From this general starting point, I derived one specific research question with two supporting questions.

#### **Research Questions**

The research questions follow a hierarchical scheme with an overarching question and two sub questions. The primary research question is, “In what ways does neoliberalism influence Canadian universities?” From this primary question, two more focused research questions are pursued. The first question is, “How and in what ways do universities include neoliberal discourse in their recruitment websites?”

The second question being, “In what ways might professors see the effects of neoliberalism in their daily activities as educators, researchers, and members of the university community?”

Each question will be addressed with a different methodological approach with the overall question being dealt with by reflecting on the results of the two sub questions. This chapter will explain the methodological choices for each question, beginning with critical discourse analysis (CDA), and moving to the ethnographic portion of this study. The website analysis portion of this chapter will explain the general contours of CDA, the relevance of the work of Fairclough to this study, and finally the specific methods of the website analysis. The second major section will outline the relevancy of an ethnographic approach to this study, the specific methods of the interviews and further explain why an ethnographic approach is a suitable compliment to a CDA based project.

### **Website Analysis**

In the discussion of neoliberalism as presented in Chapter 2, I made an important argument from the literature regarding the functioning of neoliberalism as an ideological force. Namely, that neoliberalism works at its most profound level as a dominant discourse within society and is reinforced by the various agencies, institutions, and policies that overtly and covertly pursue neoliberal ideals in their various spheres (Bauman & Donskis, 2016; Giroux, 2005; Harvey, 2007; Spring, 2008; Springer 2012). Therefore, to understand neoliberalism’s effects on the university, a logical approach might involve examining documents and other artefacts to gauge the influence of neoliberal discourse on the messaging used by various institutions. The focus on examining documents, in this case university websites, is the approach this study

employs. CDA was chosen to investigate the influence of neoliberalism within Canadian university system and, more specifically, in recruitment websites. The specifics of CDA will be discussed at length in this chapter, the explanation for the use of CDA as one of the methodologies of investigating neoliberal power in university is that CDA compels the researcher to look not only at documents and their specific content, but also the wider societal context in which they exist.

Of particular importance for the logic of this study is the discussion of the critiques of CDA. Some suggest that addressing them needs to be contextualized with an ethnographic framework (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough, 2003). Thus, the ethnographic interviews with the professors help to buttress the website analysis by providing context. The rationale for this choice will be made clear throughout this chapter.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

CDA is a branch of analysis that emerges from linguistics and critical theory, much as the name suggests. CDA is an attempt, as Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, and Joseph (2005) describe, to, “bring social theory and discourse analysis together to describe, interpret, and explain the ways in which discourse constructs, becomes constructed by, represents, and becomes represented by the social world” (p. 366). Further, CDA is primarily geared toward understanding how “language as a cultural tool mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge” (p. 367). In this way, CDA draws on theorists such as Foucault and Bourdieu and their notions of power, and actualizes this understanding into a methodology of interpreting language. The term “language” is perhaps broader than a

standard understanding of the word. Language in this study will encompass written text and graphical expression.

An example of how CDA might be used in research is provided by Fairclough (2003). He states:

Value systems and associated assumptions can be regarded as belonging to particular discourses – a neo-liberal economic and political discourse in the case of the assumption that anything which enhances “efficiency and adaptability” is desirable. Existential and propositional assumptions may also be discourse-specific – a particular discourse includes assumptions about what there is, what is the case, what is possible, what is necessary, what will be the case, and so forth. (p. 58)

Fairclough’s explanation of discourse includes not only the overt arguments for a particular order in society but also the less tangible values and assumptions built into speech and communication. Drawing on the previous chapters’ discussion of neoliberalism as a discursive power, the values and implied morality of the marketplace can both be overtly argued as is found in the work of Friedman (2002), Hayek (2014), or Von Mises (2012). However, these values can function at an almost subconscious level in coded language and assumed values.

**Power.** CDA puts an emphasis on the relationship between power and language. Van Dijk (1993) remarked that, despite the notoriety of overt use of power in the modern era, the most effective form of control, “is mostly cognitive, and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation, among other strategic ways to change the mind of others in one’s own interests” (p. 254). Further, the key areas of interrogating this power must

be the text and talk used in daily lives. The way that arguments and discussions are framed affect and shape the outcomes, because “subtle, routine, everyday forms of text and talk that appear natural and quite acceptable” (p. 254) achieve dominance.

Power shapes how discussions occur, it defines values, it constructs normalcy, and, perhaps more importantly, how abnormality is classified. Under such influence, power is not possessed in a strictly hierarchical manner; it is far more fluid than static. This fluidity of power and the social construction of normality echoes Foucault’s conception of power because, according to Fairclough (2003), Foucault’s work represents a broad theoretical foundation of CDA in general. In Foucault’s (1977) terms, power is understood as:

exercised rather than possessed; it is not the “privilege”, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who ‘do not have it’; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. (p. 27)

From this conception of power that Foucault brought to the work of the social sciences, CDA is deeply rooted in a similar understanding of power and the way it flows through society. The term dominant discourse describes not so much a discourse that is unquestionable, but merely a way of understanding and discussing issues that have a hegemonic position, inculcating themselves in the very fabric of language and meaning. CDA is an ideal choice for examining the language used in websites since it is designed to interrogate language and meaning. CDA recognizes the implicit embeddedness of



research but allows for a critical interrogation of the world. In an educational context, CDA allows the researcher to closely examine the very institution that empowers and supports its research in a significant manner by exposing ideology as it is embedded in the text.

**Tenets of CDA.** In order to explain the ideas that are inherent to CDA as a methodological approach, Rogers et al. (2005) provide eight basic tenets of CDA. They are as follows:

1. Discourse does ideological work.
  2. Discourse constitutes society and culture.
  3. Discourse is situated and historical.
  4. Power relations are partially discursive.
  5. Mediation of power relations necessitates a socio-cognitive approach.
  6. CDA is a socially committed scientific paradigm that addresses social problems.
  7. Discourse analysis is interpretive, descriptive, and explanatory and uses a ‘systematic methodology.’
  8. The role of the analyst is to study the relationships between texts and social practices.
- (p. 370)

Collectively, these eight tenets suggest that CDA encompasses an understanding of the political aspect of how ideas and values are communicated even when the discourse is presented as politically neutral. Moreover, from these eight tenets of CDA, it is evident that this type of research and approach depends upon a highly complex relationship between the society and entrenched hegemonic ideas that go, for the most part, unnoticed. Specifically, these eight tenets are important to this research in the following ways. The

first tenet is a basic assumption of the study, namely, that ideology is found in discourse. In the case of the websites that will be considered, it is expected that ideology, neoliberal or not, will be evident by examining the overt and covert messaging on the websites. The second tenet is that discourse constitutes society and culture. This point is relevant to the importance of this study. For instance, if there is a prevalence of neoliberal discourse on a particular university website, this helps create the reality of neoliberalism.

The third tenet is that discourse is situated and historical. This tenet also has applicability to this study as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter by showing the history and current aspects of neoliberalism at work in the broader society. Neoliberalism has not come developed in a vacuum. Neoliberalism is largely historically rooted as a reaction to the political calamities of the twentieth century (Harvey, 2005, p. 20), as was shown in the previous chapter. The fourth tenet is that power relations are partially discursive which means that CDA is focused on the connections between the properties of text and the social structures of society. It is not a belief of CDA that there is a deterministic relationship between text and social structure but rather that there is a notion of mediation. Or, in other words, CDA must be approached with an understanding that analysis must be done with a firm understanding of the wider social and political context.

This importance of context is somewhat related to the fifth tenet that states that mediation of power relations requires a socio-cognitive approach. In this study, both of these tenets are addressed by the discussions in both Chapter 2 and in the Conclusion. The sixth tenet argues CDA is a socially committed methodology and must address societal problems. This point is represented in this study in both the subject matter and

the framing of the research problem. Without restating it, the issue that this study confronts is the nature of the fundamental purpose of a university education and how that purpose is communicated to potential students. As a society and as individual universities, the role of education should be, at the very least, explicitly stated for no other purpose than to determine if these endeavours are successful in their own terms. The seventh tenet is focused on the procedure of CDA and simply states that the analysis should be interpretive, descriptive, and explanatory using a systematic methodology. This tenet will be obvious as the structure of the study is presented and during the discussion of the results. Finally, the eighth tenet is that the role of the analyst is to study the relationship between text and social practices. In the first two chapters of this study and in the conclusion, there are a great deal of contextual discussions that help fulfill this requirement. This contextual element will and does connect the textual analysis of the websites to social practices/trends along with the interviews that further ground the research.

**Complexity of CDA.** Van Dijk (1993) acknowledges the complexity that is inherent in this methodological approach. The potential problem is that when an idea, or a system of ideas and values, are hegemonic within a society, these ideas, by definition, are accepted by most of the society. If certain values were considered to be self-evident, they hardly would require anyone to think critically about their implications or even their merits. It is within this context that Van Dijk argues that CDA is well suited to examining such complexity because, admittedly, any such research presupposes that it will be “far from straightforward, and does not always imply a clear picture of villains and victims” (p. 256). The very notion of hegemony of this sort precludes an easy binary of opposition.

Van Dijk goes on to argue that, because of the embedded nature of the researchers themselves, CDA must take an explicit socio-political stance. He states that researchers should, “spell out their point of view, perspective, principles, and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large” (p. 252). This was done in the introduction to this study where I am firm about my perspective on the purpose of this research.

Fairclough (2002) situates critical discourse analysis as particularly able to interrogate neoliberalism and what he describes as “new capitalism” (2002, p. 163). New capitalism refers to the type of enterprises that dominate the production of culture and communications that have been given life by the Internet revolution. In this context, language, broadly defined as the communications that occur in all media, becomes a commodity itself and repositions knowledge as a marketable commodity. Therefore, Fairclough argues that economics colonizes all other fields including the political, the educational, and even the artistic. Fairclough (2002) further argues that, as capitalism transforms into this new form that is based on knowledge as a commodity, it is also, and importantly for this research, discourse led. That is to say that those knowledges are:

produced, circulated and consumed as discourses (economic, organizational, managerial, political, educational and so forth). Moreover, discourses are dialectically materialized...in the ‘hardware’ and ‘software’ of organizations, enacted as ways of acting and interacting, and inculcated (through a variety of processes including, e.g. ‘skills training’) as ways of being, as identities. (p. 163)

This materialization of discourses is the type of phenomena that can be observed in institutions of higher learning and as CDA is unapologetic about its socio-political stance, it is a well-suited methodology to confront the neoliberal turn in education. Indeed, as

Rodgers et al. (2005) point out in their list of what constitutes CDA, critical discourse analysts are committed to exposing social problems and addressing these problems through their research. Thus, it is well suited to research that is concerned with deeply imbedded power within institutions and social practices such as higher education. Because the analysis that was conducted in this study was so heavily based in CDA, I will spend some time describing its unique features.

**Discourse.** In the discussion of CDA a term that needs to be defined is the concept of what constitutes a discourse. Fairclough (2005) defines the concept of discourse in the following manner:

A discourse is a particular way of representing certain parts or aspects of the (physical, social, psychological) world; for instance, there are different political discourses (liberal, conservative, social-democratic, etc.) which represent social groups and relations between social groups in a society in different ways. (p. 925)

In this definition, Fairclough touches on the importance of discourses in filtering reality to meet a certain outlook. This definition could be expanded on and explained that discourses are systems of interpreting reality or ways of both describing the world and ordering it based upon a core of belief or beliefs.

However, allowing for multiple discourses to be extant at any given time is not to say that all discourses are equally powerful within society. This observation is abundantly clear even in relatively open societies due to the fact that even if citizens have an enshrined right to communicate their ideas and beliefs, not every voice can be heard equally and therefore some discourses are privileged over others. Every society has a class of gatekeepers and opinion makers who decide in what way the past, present, and

future are represented and how these issues are discussed. Van Dijk (1993) makes this point clear when he explains that, “except in the various forms of military, police, judicial or male force, the exercise of power usually presupposes mind management, involving the influence of knowledge, beliefs, understanding, plans, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values” (p. 257). This mind management, as he labels it, is not coercive in a traditional sense, but is effective nonetheless because it limits action by curtailing choice. Because it is not necessarily overt, mind management is, by its very nature, stealthy.

With regard to neoliberal discourse, CDA offers a practical methodological outlook to unpack meaning in a variety of different forms. Certainly, CDA has been used in many projects examining education at all levels, including at the university and college level (Ayers, 2005; Chipper, 2006; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Saichaie, 2011; Saichaie & Morphew, 2014; Taylor & Morphew, 2010). The proliferation in the use of CDA in education and the multiplicity of interpretations of its use is addressed by Rogers et al. (2005) in their detailed review of multiple educational CDA papers found across five article databases. In terms of applicability, CDA is well suited towards investigating institutions that, by their very nature, are rich in the production of various communication statements and the production of knowledge itself, such as a college or university.

For instance, this was the approach taken by Ayers (2005) with regard to the critical examination of community college mission statements. Ayers argued that, due to the very opaqueness of neoliberal ideology, critical discourse analysis is necessary to expose the:

ideological-discursive practices that, when viewed tacitly from within the Western neoliberal hegemony, seem to be neutral and commonsensical but, when analyzed

through a critical theoretical lens, refashion the meaning of community college education so that it serves the interests of those in the upper social strata. (p. 528)

Ayers' argument for the use of CDA in this particular research underlies what CDA can provide to research in general, but education research specifically, namely its capacity to capture ideology at work. This study demonstrates how CDA is applicable to a post-secondary educational environment and shows how a similar approach might be applicable to this study.

**Critique of CDA.** The growth and popularity of CDA as a research methodology has not happened without criticism from some scholars. For instance, Widdowson (1995; 1996; 1997; 1998) has devoted numerous works to questioning the practice and aims of CDA. Of particular note is the direct exchange between Widdowson (1996) and Fairclough (1996) that helps solidify some of strongest criticism of not only CDA but, in particular, Fairclough's work on CDA. The article that sparked this exchange titled "Discourse analysis: A critical view" (1995) by Widdowson, was premised on the following statement, "the argument I shall pursue is that if critical discourse analysis is an exercise in interpretation, it is invalid as analysis. The name 'critical discourse analysis', in other words, is, in my view, a contradiction in terms" (p. 159). Essentially, the critique that Widdowson levels at Fairclough and CDA is that because CDA is positioned by proponents as a politically engaged research methodology, the research conducted through CDA is tainted by the assumptions held by the researcher. Therefore, the knowledge that CDA produces is not valid, according to Widdowson.

Haig (2004) further breaks down Widdowson's cumulative criticisms of CDA into four points:

1. CDA is not analysis in support of theory but (merely) interpretation in support of belief.
2. The beliefs of analysts are ideologically biased, leading to analysts reading meaning into, rather than out of texts.
3. This bias is further compounded by the fact that the analyst selects only those texts which will confirm his or her beliefs.
4. The distinction between the interpretation of the analyst and that of the lay reader is ignored. (p.142)

In addressing the main criticism leveled by Widdowson and the four subsequent criticisms as compiled by Haig, I refer to both my own study and Fairclough's response.

Firstly, Widdowson's (1995) main critique of Fairclough's conception of CDA comes down to his definition of interpretation. This is important for Fairclough (1996) in his response to this critique and he makes defining interpretation a primary concern. To do this, Fairclough argues that there are two meanings to interpretation. The first is perhaps the most common form of interpretation, Fairclough defines it as the act of making "meaning from/with spoken or written texts" (p. 51). Fairclough calls this "interpretation-1" and this can be expanded to encompass other forms of communications such as graphical content. Interpretation-1 Fairclough argues, is not the source of the disagreement between himself and Widdowson. Interpretation-2 is what Fairclough argues Widdowson conflates to criticize CDA. He defines interpretation-2 as, "a matter of analysts seeking to show connections between both properties of texts and practices of interpretation-1 in a particular social space, and wider social and cultural properties of that particular social space" (p. 51). Fairclough argues that this second version of the



meaning of interpretation is actually Widdowson confusing explanation for interpretation. The explanation of the text is certainly a potential source of disagreement but Widdowson seemingly believes there is an objective position for researchers. This idea of the neutral observer is contested by CDA implicitly, as Fairclough argues, “CDA would argue that we are all—including Widdowson—writing from within particular discursive practices, entailing particular interests, commitments, inclusions, exclusions, and so forth” (p. 52). Fairclough’s position contests the idea of the neutral, scientific researcher that is not affected by his or her background, beliefs, and choices. The important difference, as will be seen later, is that CDA does not make claims to universal truths and the interpretation is an open-ended process (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000, p.164).

The lack of belief in universal truths is reminiscent of the root criticisms of the scientific revolution as posed by Nietzsche. For instance, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1969), Nietzsche uses an almost novel-like story of the protagonist, Zarathustra, who calls into question the notion of natural laws or concepts of universal morality. Zarathustra is presented as a traveller who “has found no greater power on earth than good and evil” (p. 84), but this should not be seen as a vindication of a universal concept of morality. Indeed, the true power resides with those who define good and evil. As the character Zarathustra points out, “much that we called evil in one place was in another decked with purple honours” (p. 84). Thus, Nietzsche argues, quite clearly, that morals are not absolutes and that any suggestion that there is some natural law explanation of specific moral codes is absurd and is just another way of acting out the will to power. In the social sciences and academia in general, Fairclough taps into this scepticism about

notions of universality by pointing out that the selective nature of research, such as picking a topic of inquiry or a problem to research, is not neutral by definition. The researcher applies an ordering of society and what is worth their time and energy. As Rocha (2013) points out, problems cannot be solved if they have not been “sufficiently vetted as problems” (p. 13) and this is where the root scepticism of Nietzsche is, for lack of a better term, useful. CDA demands that researchers recognize the power dynamics at play in their work in aspects as basic as deciding that a topic is worth studying at all.

Haig’s (2004) third point of criticism is the problem of analysts reading meaning into the sources, rather than out of them and the linked problem of selecting sources that confirm beliefs rather than contradicting them. Essentially, this is a problem of objectivity and bias clouding the collection and interpretation of data. In *Analyzing discourse: textual analysis for social research* (2003), Fairclough addresses these concerns by arguing that supposed objective social science research is motivated by the idea of making existing social structures and life, “work more efficiently and effectively, without considering moral or political questions at all” (p. 15). Therefore, there is an unconscious endorsement of existing social, economic, and political structures that remains largely unquestioned or unnoticed in these seemingly objective or neutral research methods. Fairclough argues that:

Neither approach is “objective” in a simple sense, both approaches are based in particular interests and perspectives, but that does not prevent either of them being perfectly good social science. Nor does it mean that the social import and effects of particular research are transparent: social research may have outcomes which are far from what was intended or expected. (p. 15)

CDA, in this sense, is upfront about the political position it takes and does not leave it up to other scholars to discern what potential biases the researcher may or may not have. Furthermore, as Fairclough states, the outcome of the research is by no means guaranteed. In this study, I ascertain where neoliberal ideology is at play in Canadian universities but I am not attempting to demonstrate it at work in every artefact or, for that matter, every website. However, it should be said that no piece of text, graphic, or other message has a monolithic meaning. This is because the meaning making takes place in the individual. Yet, the evidence will lead the interpretation rather than interpretation leading the evidence and the sources will not be selected on their ability to confirm my political stances.

The fourth general criticism of CDA raised by Haig is the question of the interpretation of the artefact by the interpreter rather than the intended audience or layperson. This criticism of CDA is important to address because it does raise a question of context of the analysis. Put in a different way, the audience can read a completely different meaning into a fragment than what the researcher did and if the audience is not consulted, the interpretation of evidence may be flawed. There are at least two responses to this criticism. The first, is that this study is concerned with the messaging, either intentional or not, as found in the recruitment documents and therefore is not focused on the interpretation that a layperson may have. This is a somewhat nuanced point because the goal of this portion of the study is to answer the question of how universities include neoliberal discourse in their recruitment websites, not to gauge the impact of the messaging itself.

Secondly, as Fairclough (2003) argues and is also argued by Blommaert and

Bulcaen (2000), “to research meaning-making, one needs to look at interpretations of texts as well as texts themselves, and more generally at how texts practically figure in particular areas of social life, which suggests that textual analysis is best framed within ethnography” (p. 15). To be fully effective, textual analysis should be paired or situated within ethnography because it helps explain how these texts function within a broader societal context. This study does incorporate an ethnographic methodology to help provide that wider context. Beyond the contextual support that the ethnographic portion of this study provides, this study, as stated earlier is meant to be a hybrid approach to examining the effect of neoliberalism on universities. By using my background in philosophy and employing both a critical discourse analysis and an ethnographic approach, this study is multifaceted, and this should help mitigate potential shortcomings of any one methodology.

**Validity.** The validity of the results of a CDA study is certainly a concern. The important point with regard to CDA and validity is that the analysis is both intelligible and the results must be recognizable to other researchers (Titscher et al., 2000). It should be said, that there is no absolute interpretation of the texts being analyzed. However, Titscher et al. (2000) state that,

Critical discourse analysis must be intelligible in its interpretations and in addition, the validity of CDA results is not absolute and immutable but always open to new contexts and information which might cause the results to change. The interplay of open-endedness and intelligibility, and of the interpretative and explanatory nature of its analysis, are important criteria for CDA. One further characteristic requirement which results must meet is that of practical relevance.

CDA is concerned with social problems: the usability of its findings is a precondition. (p.164)

To this end, this study draws certain conclusions from the texts being analyzed but these interpretations will be explained and open to other analysis. The work of the analysis will be to make a coherent explanation of why the interpretations of the materials are valid and logical. The final point of usability of the findings is also applicable in this study. By examining documents specifically for public consumption, this study has some obvious practical uses including understanding the messaging intended or otherwise by universities in trying to recruit students. This utilitarian aspect of the study might better focus the future messaging of universities.

**The appropriate choice of CDA for website analysis.** Given the general critiques of CDA discussed in the previous section, I will directly address the choice of CDA for this study and its appropriateness. Currently, the existing literature of studies that have used CDA to examine university recruitment websites is admittedly scarce (Askehave 2007, Saichaie 2011). However, there are some examples of studies with a similar focus that employed CDA to successfully examine similar subjects in higher education (Ayers 2005, Chipper 2006, Saichaie & Morpew 2014). While there are not a large number of studies that have used CDA for this specific research topic, these few studies have shown that CDA is a valuable tool to research the potential infiltration of neoliberal ideology and consumerist language into the idea of the university as being presented to the outside world.

Moreover, the development and focus of CDA is particularly well suited towards finding connections between language and society (Rogers et al., 2005). Referring back

to the criticisms that Widdowson and others have levelled against CDA in general and Fairclough in particular, this study mitigates the potential problem of the discourse analysis being taken out of context by firmly setting the societal context in which these textual fragments are being examined. Further, by pairing CDA with the interview section of this study, the textual analysis is grounded to an ethnographic approach that, as stated earlier, is an approach that helps mitigate potential problems of context.

The focus on Fairclough as the primary theorist that I used for this study is based on the following considerations. Fairclough was perceptive of the effects of marketization on the discursive practices of universities before many others (Askehave, 2007). While this fact on its own can be dismissed as merely an interesting anecdote, Fairclough's consistent work on using CDA to examine neoliberalism (Fairclough, 1993 1999, 2000, 2002) suggests that his analysis is practical for this type of research because of his keen and prescient understanding of the concept. Further, Fairclough is one of the preeminent theorists of CDA and is part of the founding generation this methodology according to Wodak (2001). This makes his work important to the field and he has demonstrated its applicability to a study in this subject area with Fairclough's 1993 article "Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketization of Public Discourse: The Universities". This article both explains the methodology and its applicability to the marketization of universities.

### **Analysis**

The specific analysis that was done followed Fairclough's three-dimensional analytic framework (1993) and further elaborated by Rogers et al. (2005). Fairclough (1993) describes this three-dimensional analysis by arguing that, "each discursive event

has three dimensions or facets: it is a spoken or written language text, it is an instance of discourse practice involving the production and interpretation of text, and it is a piece of social practice” (1993, p. 16). Rogers et al. (2005) further this basic framework by explaining that:

The analysis of the text involves the study of the language structures produced in a discursive event. An analysis of the discursive practice involves examining the production, consumption, and reproduction of the texts. The analysis of sociocultural practice includes an exploration of what is happening in a particular sociocultural framework. (p. 371)

Keeping in mind Fairclough’s (1993) three-dimensional analysis, the interpretation of the university websites followed the same pattern. The data was first analyzed on a textual level. This textual level analysis is concerned with the specific function of the text itself and its construction. The second level of analysis is “concerned with how people interpret and reproduce or transform texts” (p. 371). The final level of analysis will be concerned, “with issues of power—power being a construct that is realized through interdiscursivity and hegemony” (p. 371). Or, put in a slightly different way, the relation between the text and broader power structures at work in society. In summary, the websites were analyzed at the literal textual level, proceeding to analyze likely interpretations of the meaning of the texts by the audience and finally, the relation of the text to broader societal power relations.

Because this study is focused on the influence of neoliberalism on the language and the idea of the university as communicated on university websites, the focus will be on ascertaining where this ideology is at play in these texts. In order to present the

findings in a coherent fashion, the universities examined were classified in terms of the overall infiltration of neoliberal ideology into their texts. This will involve categorizing them into three broad groups:

1. Slightly Affected
2. Moderately Affected
3. Heavily Affected

The categorization was based on the overall impression of the websites but is not meant to be anything than an organizational decision to allow for a more efficient discussion of the results and to share commonalities between different institutions. Given that the overall research question for this study is concerned with the ways that neoliberalism influences Canadian universities, the categorization serves this question by providing the study an easily understood view of how universities are affected and to what degrees.

Universities that displayed an almost unanimous neoliberal discourse were places in the heavily affected category. Universities that showed mostly neoliberal messaging but had some countering narratives were put in the moderately affected category and universities that showed almost no neoliberal discourse were put in the slightly affected category.

**CDA Data Collection.** In conducting the analysis, I collected online recruitment data from the universities listed in the 2014 *Maclean's* Magazine University rankings of comprehensive universities, excluding the single Francophone institution. The reason for excluding the single Francophone institution, the Université du Québec à Montréal, is simply due to my language limitations and the necessary understanding of nuance and complexity that CDA requires. However, given the events of the 2012 student protests in Quebec, colloquial referred to as the “Maple Spring” (Lowrie, 2017), there is important



work that could be done by examining the specific dynamics at work in francophone universities of Quebec. The rationale for choosing the *Maclean's* rankings of comprehensive universities as the basis for selection is premised on a number of factors. Firstly, the rankings have a wide colloquial acceptance as the most readily accessible ranking of universities in Canada. According to Rogers Media, the parent company of *Maclean's*, the magazine has a circulation of 241,367 and receives 7.6 million website impressions per month (Rogers, 2016). In short, as a rankings service for Canadian universities, *Maclean's* has a virtual monopoly in mainstream culture. Secondly, if the premise that this rankings system is one of the primary tools that Canadian educational customers use to gauge the relative strengths and weaknesses of universities, it stands to reason that the institutions that are highlighted by the magazine's rankings are at least well known to the public. The prominence of the *Maclean's* rankings in Canada suggests that when prospective students make choices about education, these universities will be among the institutions considered because they are positioned as the best.

There are three broad categories that *Maclean's* uses when ranking universities based on the programming offered. These three categories include, primary undergraduate, comprehensive, and medical doctoral universities. The choice of using those institutions listed in the comprehensive category is based on the rationale that *Maclean's* used for including these institutions into this category, namely, that these institutions "have a significant degree of research activity and a wide range of programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels, including professional degrees" (Dwyer, 2013). Furthermore, because these universities are geared toward attracting a more general student, they are focused on the core ideas of what a university education might offer.

Therefore, each of these institutions provides a wide range of disciplines, programs, and professional degrees. This is important as these larger institutions can provide a window into the broad strategies and arguments used by universities to attract students. By being part of this category of university, these institutions do not necessarily rely only on unique distinctions such as geographical locations. The final reason for using the *Maclean's* listing is that it provides a manageable data set that can be explored in depth and analyzed with sufficient care as required for this study. CDA, as discussed earlier, is a methodology requiring in-depth analysis (Rogers et al., 2005).

The *Maclean's* listing carries with it a whole set of problematic criteria and weighting to their rankings which could very well make for another study. *Maclean's* acknowledges these issues when introducing Mary Dwyer, the lead editor for their university rankings, by stating that she is “responsible for the popular but controversial university rankings” (*Maclean's*, 2013). If nothing else, the *Maclean's* rankings system has purchase in the public sphere. This wide distribution at the colloquial level provides a good reason to use this ranking system given the purpose of this study.

Specifically, I used the 2014 *Maclean's* university rankings of comprehensive schools to determine which schools' webpage contents were examined. The universities included in this list are the University of Victoria, Simon Fraser University, the University of Waterloo, The University of New Brunswick, the University of Guelph, Memorial University, Carleton University, the University of Regina, York University, Ryerson University, Wilfrid Laurier University, The University of Windsor, Concordia University, and Brock University. Beyond determining the choice of institutions, the rankings were otherwise ignored, as they have no impact on the substance of this study.

The *Maclean's* rankings are a colloquial reference that most academics in Canada and many in the general public would understand even if the actual system of rankings is problematic.

Almost every major region of Canada is covered in the list of comprehensive schools except Northern Canada. Similarly, there is a bias given to Ontario that holds 8 of the 14 schools listed. This is defensible for many reasons. The most obvious defense is that Ontario has the largest provincial population in the country and that it is natural that Ontario has a larger representation in this study. The pertinent defense about this abundance of representation of Ontario is that the intent of this study is to study a cross section of universities rather than compile an exhaustive comparison of every Canadian university. Because these institutions all offer a similar level of services and programs, they compete for the same group of potential students, acknowledging that many students attend the university closest to them geographically to reduce costs if they can live with their parents.

**Website Procedures.** The first stage of data collection involved going to the main recruitment webpages for each of these universities. The type of documents that were sought were those that are aimed at the general audience of students and parents that compare the various claims for quality and services provided by each university. Program specific documents were avoided only because the intent of the study is to examine patterns and themes across universities rather than examining the claims of any one specific program or faculty. To be specific, the types of documents that were examined were those that are specifically targeted potential prospective undergraduate students. For instance, many universities have webpages for future students, which have links to

further information for undergraduate students. These documents are all meant to portray the unique advantages and qualities of the university including residency information, student/campus life, and academic program information. However, exceptions may be made if they help to underline a trend within the general marketing strategy of the university. Once the documents were printed out, they were filed into a larger document folder and each piece of text underwent a review.

The physical collection of documents was compiled within one month in 2014 to avoid difficulties in retrieving documents and text from updated websites that may not be archived. While it was expected that most of the documents under examination were going to be text-based, I did encounter video, graphic, and audio content used in recruiting potential students. To provide as much depth as possible to this study, these materials were also included in the data retrieval, some of which I transcribed, as necessary. Once all the materials were compiled and organized into a binder, I began the next phase of analysis.

The second phase of analysis involved carefully perusing and interrogating all of the different pieces collected from each university. Each piece of data was carefully examined and subjected to analysis using Fairclough's understanding of CDA, which, for this study, was based mainly on uncovering the assumptions embedded in the various texts and documents and applying the previously mentioned three-dimensional model of CDA (Fairclough, 1993). My research examined these different recruitment documents looking for neoliberal assumptions built into the documents.

The third phase of analysis involved compiling these statements and providing a thorough analysis of what ideologies was at work in each example. This involved using

Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis model that was previously discussed. In short, the data was subjected to a textual analysis, an interpretative analysis and finally an ideological analysis (Fairclough, 1993, p. 371).

The fourth stage of analysis involved comparing the individual conclusions from each university to each other. This stage was the most interesting with regard to portraying the larger story of university education and neoliberalism in Canada, at least among the top-ranked comprehensive schools. The process of comparing the claims, ideas, and ideologies between 14 major universities in Canada required some level of generalization in describing and thinking about post-secondary education as a whole and indicated what forces are acting and exerting power, at least in the recruiting of potential students.

In sum, by organizing, analyzing and reflecting on the various arguments made by these 14 universities, I provided a detailed assessment about how education is represented to prospective students. This analysis is important to the larger discussion of the place of universities in society and how they represent education. While this may only represent a small portion of the functioning and idea of the university, it did provide a strong base on which to discuss the forces and ideologies that exert power on education. This analysis was then tied to the second phase of the proposed study, and that was the guided interview section.

## **Interviews**

The second sub-research question of this study is in what ways might professors see the effects of neoliberalism in their daily activities as educators, researchers, and members of the university community? To answer this question and to compliment the

CDA portion of the study, I used an ethnographic approach. I chose to focus on professors because their daily work takes place in university in the context of a long-term career, as opposed to students whose university-focused lives are comparatively short term. One of the main criticisms of CDA, as discussed earlier, is that the results of a CDA study can be misleading without context. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) and Fairclough (2003) suggest incorporating a CDA study into an ethnographic approach in order to avoid the problem of lack of context. Thus, interviews were designed to bolster this analysis by providing complimentary data about the wider impact of neoliberalism on the practice of education within a university.

**Ethnography.** The overall goal of this research is to examine the ways in which neoliberalism influence Canadian universities. The CDA examination of the recruitment information is intended to delineate to what degree neoliberal ideology has been internalized into the recruiting language of universities. This is an important avenue of research because these documents provide a description of how education is represented by the universities to the outside world in the realm of marketing. Explicit to the interview portion of the study was that the interviews are meant to serve as a way of expanding on the ideas encountered in the CDA. By seeking out individuals who have spent most of their careers as both students and now professors, participants provided unique insight into the current context of how neoliberalism shapes their work environment.

The interviews tap into the experiences and ideas of a small group of professors who have obvious expertise in the practice of education at the university level. It is important to understand that universities are unique social institutions that function as a

distinct culture within society. Universities have an organizational structure, a set of practices and an interconnected web of acquaintances and connections that run in a self-contained society. Of course, it is not a completely cloistered existence, but it is certainly different from the way in which other parts of society function. Universities have a distinct hierarchy and a unique culture of behaviour that is separate from the larger society context within which they operate.

Starting from this premise, the methodological approach for this section of the study is firmly rooted in ethnography. Ethnography, as a methodology, originates from anthropology and is the work of describing a culture. Unlike some approaches, ethnography is the practice of learning from people rather than studying people (Spradley, 1980). The sensibility of being immersed in a subject rather than being strictly isolated from the subject, as found in more positivist research approaches, is appropriate for the type of work I conducted in this study.

Biehl and McKay (2012) argue that ethnography is not only useful but also vital when confronting the effects of neoliberalism. The premise from which Biehl and McKay derive their arguments is the idea that since the end of the Cold War, the world has been splintered and that, “in a splintered world, we must address the splinters” (p. 1209). Consequently, Biehl and McKay argue that researchers must consider and examine what ethnography can provide in studying these splinters and conclude that:

As anthropologists, we can strive to do more than simply mobilize real-world messiness to expose predatory practices and complicate ordered philosophy and statistical-centered and cost-effectiveness-minded policy approaches. Both the evidentiary force and theoretical contribution of anthropology might be intimately

linked to giving creative form to people's art of living ... Rather than illustrating a world irrevocably splintered by globalization and ever more resistant to theoretical engagement, we learn from the books reviewed here that, by repopulating public imagination with people and their precarious yet creative world-making, ethnography makes politics matter differently. (p. 1223)

This idea that ethnography can provide the researcher with the lived experiences of people directly affected by the somewhat ethereal forces around them is what is sought from the interviews in this study.

**Universities as a distinct culture.** In the simplest terms, ethnography is “the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities” (Reeves, Kuper & Hodges, 2008, p. 512). Thus, ethnography is a tool that has applicability in multiple scenarios that can involve corporations, police departments and, in this case, the universities. Similarly, Erickson (1984) argues that it is imperative that ethnographic research not be limited to nations, linguistic groups, regions, or villages. Instead, Erickson argues that ethnography is appropriate for any social group that is regulated by internal customs. Thus, for Erickson, ethnographic studies are ethnographic not only because they treat social units as a whole, but that the “ethnography portrays events, at least in part, from the points of view of the actors involved in the events” (p. 52). Such concern for portraying events from the point of view of the actors involved is in line with the research goals of this study. These interviews ground and provide context for the study.

In Erickson’s article on the question of “what makes school ethnography ethnographic?” his thesis is quite clear from the outset that ethnographic inquiry is not a



rigid set of inquiry methods. Rather, he argues that, “the main point of this essay is that ethnography should be considered a deliberate inquiry process guided by a point of view, rather than a reporting process guided by a standard technique or set of techniques, or a totally intuitive process that does not involve reflection” (p. 51). Erickson’s thesis encapsulates the spirit of this interview process. What is most important is the genuine interest in gaining knowledge from the people directly affected by the phenomena being studied.

**Participants.** The choice of recruiting professors who specialize in sociology of education, the philosophy of education or critical pedagogy is based on the idea that they would be best placed to have thought deeply about their experiences and university education as a whole. This is in keeping with the concept put forward by O’Reilly (2008) in discussing the idea of key informants. Essentially, it is the idea that some participants are more likely to be consciously reflexive about the culture and practices of their group (p.133).

These participants are also likely to at least understand and might be potentially engaged in similar research on topics surrounding the concepts of this study. In the recruitment letter, the topic of this research was given and the participants were aware of the subject matter I was studying. This gave them time to reflect about their own experiences in academia, what changes they may have seen, and the importance of neoliberalism in these changes and experiences. While there are certainly limitations to the selection process in terms of the focus on these specific disciplines, not requiring a certain background beyond being a professor in these fields or looking for participants from specific Canadian universities, the intent was to gather concentrated and in-depth

data from professors who were interested in providing their voices to this research. The approach was to treat every interview as a collaborative event where the guiding questions provided a standard frame of reference for what was expected and would sound and feel like a conversation between colleagues.

**The role of the researcher.** Ethnography also has a strong tendency toward activism and politically engaged scholarship. For instance, Lipman (2005) wrote that ethnographers should engage in the discourse around them. Lipman goes on to state that:

This means illuminating connections between the local and the global, examining ways neoliberalism and imperialism as well as resistance and democratic alternatives work through local policies and practices. I also am supporting activist research that challenges-together with students, teachers, and communities-the ways in which schooling is being used to further a dangerous agenda of political coercion, economic and social inequality, racial exclusion, war, and the commodification of social life. We need more research that examines in complex, nuanced ways the possibilities of projects that bear the seeds of an alternative future grounded in participatory democracy and economic and social justice. (p. 326)

The implications of Lipman's arguments in my research are that I see the role of the researcher as being both important and part of change. My work exposes the challenges that discourses have on society by simply pointing out that they exist. My work can bring about change by identifying these various discourses and identify how they influence society.

Concerning how this outlook affected the interview method used for my research, there is a specific differentiation that needs to be made from the outset. In Spradley's (1979) methodology, the term "subject" is avoided. Instead, the preferred term is "informant." The reasons for this relates to the idea that ethnographies portray events from the perspective of those affected by the phenomena or events being studied. The informant is meant to denote some level of collaboration between the researcher and the people being researched. According to Spradley, an ethnographer seeks out "ordinary people with ordinary knowledge and builds on their common experience. Slowly, and through a series of interviews, by repeated explanations and through the use of special questions, ordinary people become excellent informants" (p. 25). Of course, some might question the notion that professors are ordinary people and in normal situations, such scepticism would be justified.

***Social position of professors.*** The criticism could also be raised that by the selection of professors over students to conduct interviews seems to violate the ordinary people argument of Spradley (1979). However, in Johnson's (1990) guide to selecting ethnographic informants, it is clear that, "informants are often selected on the basis of their attributes, such as access to certain kinds of information or knowledge that itself may be a function of such things as social status, position in an organization, or comprehension of cultural knowledge" (p. 10). In the case of selecting professors as informants, it is obvious that they do enjoy a greater social status within universities in comparison to students. Yet—and this will come up in the interviews with the professors—some professors feel as though their own power is diminished when students are thought to be and consider themselves consumers of a product. A consumer has a

belief that their needs supersede that of the retailer. It is also evident that professors occupy important positions within the community of a university. To ensure that I was speaking to people more likely to be able to inform my research, a particular profile for the professor was sought out relating to their specialities.

While Johnson is by no means arguing that informants must meet those three criteria, it is also evident that there is nothing necessarily wrong in seeking out members of the community who may have a better vantage point to observe and think about change. Johnson describes this type of selection methodology as judgement sampling. Judgement sampling, according to Johnson, is choosing respondents based on a specific reason or purpose. This selection is “guided by an ethnographer’s theoretically and experientially informed judgements” (p. 28). In the case of this study, respondents were selected based on their perceived quality with relation to understanding the changes brought about by neoliberalism. Doing so echoes what Tremblay (1957) describes as ‘natural observers’. Natural observers are defined by Tremblay as being interested in the behaviour of others, being keen observers of the development/changes in institutions “and often speculate and make inferences about them” (p. 693). However, even in his work, Tremblay identifies police officers, judges, and teachers as being potential candidates for this role of natural observers within a society and thus validates the idea of selecting respondents with specific skills and experiences over a more ad hoc selection process.

***Participant recruitment.*** In order to recruit the respondents for this study, a letter was composed that highlights the focus and goals of my doctoral research and that also explains the format of the interview (see Appendix 1; Letter of Information). The letter

was sent through email to professors in sociology of education, the philosophy of education, and/ or critical pedagogy who were found listed on faculties of education webpages. The goal was to recruit 6 to 10 respondents.

The choice of limiting the number of interviews to 6-10 was due to many factors and was decided in consultation with my advisor. The overriding concern was to provide an adequate level and amount of insight from the participants that would provide a complementary function to the website analysis. It was critical to provide enough data but also to make certain that the study would be manageable given the length and scope of the research. The essential term to justify this choice is that of saturation. O'Reilly (2009) defines saturation as the point where "no new theoretical insights or properties are revealed when new data are gathered. Saturation means being able to talk abstractly and generally about the data in a way that is inclusive, subtle, and complete" (p. 97). This definition is bolstered by Mason (2010) who, in an article that examined the issues of sample sizes in doctoral ethnographic dissertations, claims that saturation is a contested term stating that, "new data (especially if theoretically sampled) will always add something new, but there are diminishing returns, and the cut off between adding to emerging findings and not adding, might be considered inevitably arbitrary" (2010, "Conclusion," para. 4). This conclusion by Mason is reinforced by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) in their article examining the concept of saturation and what is the minimal necessary number of interviews needed to achieve saturation. They argue that, "our review [of various qualitative guidelines] was that the same literature did a poor job of operationalizing the concept of saturation, providing no description of how saturation

might be determined and no practical guidelines for estimating sample sizes for purposively sampled interviews” (p. 60).

Ultimately, had the sample size proved to be too small, I would have reassessed and I would have altered the plan and recruited more participants. With that in mind, I believe that the research goals of this study were well served by the quantity and quality of responses I received, fully understanding that in another research project with a different focus, this could have been expanded to include more participants from an expanded pool of disciplines.

*A note on nomenclature.* In accordance with Spradley’s (1979) argument that respondents should be considered informants because doing so denotes a level of collaboration between the researcher and the participants and to preserve the participants’ anonymity, I initially used the “term” informant for each participant. However, after an initial draft of the results and in consultation with my advisor the decision was made to use the term “participant” and provide pseudonyms to convey a sense of personality to the discussion. However, the idea that Spradley discusses in terms of a collaborative effort between the researcher and the participants is maintained throughout this study.

*Refinement to the participant recruitment method.* The result of this initial search for participants was not entirely successful in that it found only 2 participants. To garner more participants, I forwarded the call for participants to the Canadian Association for Foundations of Education email list server that, in turn, forwarded the call for participants to their email membership. I also gained one participant through word of mouth invitation although it should also be said that some of the participants might have gained interest through word of mouth interest unbeknownst to me. By this, I mean to say

that as the participants may have been contacted formally their interest in participating may have been shaped through conversations I was not aware of nor that I initiated. Through these methods, I received 8 participants for the study and one response that was through email only, and not an interview. Each participant was also asked and required to sign a consent form (see Appendix 2; Consent Form) before the interviews were conducted.

### **The Interview Method**

The interview process was conducted after approval by the Research Ethics Board at Lakehead University and the design followed ethical guidelines as outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS 2) documents. With this in mind, I made certain that each respondent was fully able to recant or modify their responses and have full access to the various iteration of any work done based on these interviews. I hoped to instill a spirit of respect and collaboration in my research as it may have professional and personal ramifications for the respondents. In order to maintain this degree of trust, the respondents' true names were not used. In the early stages of writing, I used the term 'Informant' for each respondent. Instead of using names, I had assigned a number to each respondent. This method of referring to Informer followed by a number, for instance, Informer #4, was later altered as the resulting discussion of the results became far too sterile and cold. On the advice of my advisor, I assigned first names to each respondent based on their gender identity. Each name was assigned based on a list from the names from Babycenter.com from the list of "Popular Baby Names for 2015" (Popular Baby Names for 2015, 2015). The assigned names had no relation to the actual names of the respondents. Instead, each name was assigned in

descending order based on gender identity. I do not believe that gender factored highly in the interviews, but nevertheless, by assigning names based on gender, anyone reading my results can see if it was a man or a woman who made the statement.

The respondents were all professors whose areas of study include either sociology of education, the philosophy of education, and/ or critical pedagogy.

**Interview method.** Bearing in mind what has been said thus far about the recruitment of participants, the interviews were conducted as soon as it was feasible for each participant and after I secured approval from the Research Ethics Board at Lakehead University. Although I would have preferred these interviews to be held in person, it was not possible due to participants' location or schedules. Thus, the interviews were conducted via telephone. These interviews were recorded using *QuickVoice Recorder for Mac* without taking notes during the interview. A series of guiding questions were used to help me keep focus and guide the conversation. Once the interview was completed, the audio was transcribed into a text file and was sent to the participant so as to assure that they were comfortable with the answers they provided during the interview.

The interviews began with a short introduction as to who I am and what I intended to achieve through the interviews as well as to the general goals of the research. Each interview was conducted in private, taking anywhere from 45 minutes to almost 2 hours. There were seven guiding questions. These questions were not asked in rapid succession, nor necessarily even posed as they are written here. Instead, what occurred is that the participant led the conversation into new areas that they considered to be important which I may not have foreseen. With this caveat in mind, the questions that shaped the conversation are as follows:



1. What does the term 'neoliberalism' mean to you and how much importance do you believe it has in society?
2. In higher education, what do you identify as the effects of neoliberalism? Do you see these effects as beneficial to students and, ultimately, to society? In what way or ways?
3. As an educator, what do you believe your roles and responsibilities might be to students?
4. What are some of the general purposes of university education to students and society?
5. Over the course of your career, do you feel that neoliberal ideas have become more or less persuasive and pervasive?
6. [If they describe negative effects,] Are there ways you actively resist neoliberal effects on the university in your practice as an academic?
7. Is neoliberalism a topic of conversation among your colleagues? Can you describe instances of when these conversations took place and the general content of them? Is it addressed or discussed in faculty meetings and/ or Faculty Association meetings? Or, does neoliberalism impact the work you do, or don't do, in the university?

Question 5 could be answered with a yes or no response, however, during the interviews I pursued a more detailed response from the participants in order to avoid a binary answer.

Question 6, was expanded upon during the interviews to seek the respondents' ideas on the impact of neoliberalism regardless if the respondent considered it a problem. The sum importance of the interview process was to encourage the participant to be

considered about their thoughts on neoliberalism and university education. The entire purpose of this stage of the dissertation was to ask those who are well positioned to observe and encounter neoliberalism as it affects education, what their thoughts are on the subject and to search for strategies of resistance. Conversely, if it was the participant's belief that a university that implements neoliberal policies or ideas is a benefit for society and students, I wanted to know how they see that as beneficial.

Once each participant approved her or his transcript, I searched the data for commonalities between responses and general themes both within and amongst each participant's responses. I also looked for particularly compelling or contrarian responses. Erikson (1984) argued that, "none of our insights can be billed as 'positive knowledge', nor should they be. By presenting our conclusions as possible rather than certain, I think we can achieve credibility without mystification. To people of action, our ethnographic inquiry can be useful by providing new vantage points for reflection; a modest goal, but an honest one resistant to that inflation of hope whose end is cynicism" (1984, p. 66). The intended result of consulting with the participants was to provide new vantage points by which the phenomena of neoliberalism might be interrogated. Just as Erickson would say, this is a modest goal.

### **Thematic Analysis**

In both data sets, I used a thematic sorting procedure to analyze the data from the CDA and the interview portions of the study. Thematic analysis is defined in the following manner by Ayres (2008):

Thematic analysis is a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed in a way that

captures the important concepts within the data set. Thematic analysis is primarily a descriptive strategy that facilitates the search for patterns of experience within a qualitative data set; the product of a thematic analysis is a description of those patterns and the overarching design that unites them. (p. 868)

This process is appropriate for this study as it helps take a large amount of data from a variety of sources and presents the commonalities and distinguishing features in both data sets. This also allows for the type of philosophical discussion that I wish to spark through this research.

The process of discovering and communicating the thematic sorting follows a similar pattern to that laid out by Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (2006). Specifically, they discuss the idea of metathemes, which they define as, “as are major constructs that highlight overarching issues in a study which may be considered against extant literature and experience” (p. 208). The goal of this research is to seek out how neoliberalism might influence Canadian universities. Thus, a focus on the major constructs that highlight overarching issues is consistent with the overall goals of this study. The specific process in discovering these themes and metathemes is laid out in an 11-step process highlighted by Ely et al. These steps are as follows:

1. Study and re-study the raw data to develop detailed, intimate knowledge.
2. Note initial impressions.
3. List tentative categories.
4. Refine categories by examining the results of steps 2 and 3 and returning to the entire database of step 1.
5. Group data under the still-tentative categories and revise categories if needed.

6. Select verbatim narrative to link the raw data to the categories.
7. Study results of step 6 and revise if needed.
8. Write theme statements for each participant from my best attempt to speak from her/his point of view by linking data in and across categories.
9. Integrate findings about each person.
10. Compare findings for all the persons for commonalities or patterns, differences, and unique happenings.
11. Repeat the entire procedure for each focus and/or question that is pertinent to the study. (p. 209)

In broad strokes, this was the process followed for both the interview data and the website analysis. The choice of thematic analysis is intended to allow for the discussion of and providing focus to a large amount of data with various themes, ideas, and positions.

Ultimately, the choice of including two different research methods and methodologies, beyond the arguments of Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) and Fairclough (2003) concerning grounding CDA in an ethnological approach, was based on the idea that a mixed methods approach would give this research the best vantage point to examine the power and scope of neoliberalism in the academy. Johnson and Onquegbuzie (2004) contend that within the education research community, there is a polarized debate over how to approach research and what methodologies should be used. While Johnson and Onquegbuzie are precisely focused on the question of quantitative versus qualitative research, their argument is nonetheless relevant to this project as they argue that:

Today's research world is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, complex, and dynamic; therefore, many researchers need to complement one method with another, and all researchers need a solid understanding of multiple methods used by other scholars to facilitate communication, to promote collaboration, and to provide superior research. Taking a non-purist or compatibilist or mixed position allows researchers to mix and match design components that offer the best chance of answering their specific research questions. (p. 14)

Johnson and Onquegbuzie describe the adoption of a mixed methods approach as being a logical position that allows researchers to understand the material and issues they research and also help develop the skills of the researcher. They view of the value of incorporating multiple streams of data and analysis into a single project was at the core of the choice to have both methodologies in this thesis. I also recognize that this study is not the end of my research but the beginning, providing a strong bridgehead into the issue of neoliberalism in the academy.

## **Conclusion**

The methodological choices for this study were made to address the primary and secondary research questions I asked in Chapter 1. I have demonstrated the reasoning for these choices through this chapter and the complimentary nature of combining the CDA website analysis and the ethnographic interviews to pursue the overall research goals. In the following chapters, I discuss the results of the website analysis, the findings from the interviews and, in the conclusion, I join both of these approaches together along with the overall finding of this inquiry.



## **Chapter 4: Website Analysis**

As stated in the introduction and further elaborated in the methodology chapter, this study encompasses both a critical discourse analysis of 14 university websites and interviews with 8 professors who specialize in one of: philosophy of education, sociology of education, or critical pedagogy. The analysis of the website follows Fairclough's (1993) three-dimensional model of CDA. This means that I analyzed the websites at the literal textual level, proceeding to analyze likely interpretations of the meaning of the texts by the audience and finally, the relation of the text to broader societal power relations.

### **General Observations**

Overall, what can be said about the CDA portion of the study is that each university appeal to students and approaches their website in a variety of different ways. For instance, a university may advertise the successful transition of students to the workplace and, at the same time, speak about experience of learning for its own sake. Thus, a university does not necessarily follow a strict orthodoxy when advertising the benefits of attending the institution.

Most universities examined provide a variety of arguments to recruit students based on a variety of services and features particular to their institution. This might include discussions about their facilities, their co-op programs, or even explicit evidence using international rankings or data regarding post-graduation employment rates. While this general observation will be expanded upon later in this section, I note here that the perceived effort put into the design of each university recruitment page was not uniform among the differing universities. Some universities obviously invested many hours of

work and seemingly large budgets to make their pages extremely entertaining, easy to navigate, and used a distinct voice or tone. Other university websites seemed either incomplete or, at least, much more matter-of-fact in tone with the basic necessary information for students but not providing much else. This general observation suggests, at least, that some universities invest a great deal of effort and many resources into maintaining a large Internet presence specifically geared toward recruitment and others do not. This may reflect a lack of resources available to some universities, but it may also suggest a different focus. For instance, Ryerson's homepage is seemingly professional and engaging, but it seems as if the university is far more concerned about the utility of the homepage for their own students rather than attracting potential students. Nevertheless, each of the 14 university websites provided a large set of data and observations that could be analyzed and examined.

The universities that were examined included The University of Victoria, Simon Fraser University, The University of Waterloo, The University of New Brunswick, the University of Guelph, Memorial University, Carleton University, The University of Regina, York University, Ryerson University, Wilfrid Laurier University, The University of Windsor, Concordia University, and Brock University. Even some of the smallest websites in terms of volume of text and graphics resulted in large volumes of notes and analysis. For instance, the University of Windsor's recruitment pages were sparse and modest compared to that of York University's recruitment pages. Even still, Windsor's website provided enough material to account for nearly 3,500 words of analysis and notes. All of this is to say that, in order to give an ordered and logical explanation of what has been found and its importance, a complete account of each university is not feasible.



Instead, I proceed by grouping the universities into three large groups based on the overall impression and the perceived amount of neoliberal arguments used in the messaging of the university. Doing so resulted in three categories including the slightly affected, moderately affected, and heavily affected categories. To reiterate a point made in the methodology chapter, these categories and the act of categorization are meant to serve as a useful sorting mechanism to present the analysis rather than a critical part of the analysis itself. These categories are meant to allow for a more fluidity in the discussion of the analysis.

**Categorization criteria.** Following the work of Fairclough (2003) researchers can identify hegemonic discourses operating throughout a given document by examining the text and media of the document. Fairclough states that identifying hegemony is a, “matter of seeking to universalize particular meanings in the service of achieving and maintaining dominance, and this is ideological work” (p. 58). In this case, the ideological work being sought is neoliberalism. Thus, the criteria for determining which category each university should fall into involved using the three-dimensional analysis as previously discussed and applying it to the totality of the artefacts and documents retrieved from each university. The universities that were placed into the heavily affected category demonstrated in almost all of the collected data that there was a strong use of neoliberal tropes and arguments about the nature of the university experience they offer. At the literal level, then, the likely impact on the audience, and the relation of these statements and arguments to the broader society, the language reflected a neoliberal outlook. The moderately affected category is composed of universities whose collected data seemingly showed a contested view of the nature of a university education. Thus,

there were divergent arguments for the reasons to attend the particular institution and that they were not all based in neoliberal goals. The final category used to categorize the results of the analysis was that of slightly affected. These universities showed a minimal level of neoliberal infiltration of the messaging used in the websites. Again, this categorization is a useful tool to display the results of the analysis but not the analysis itself.

An important admission regarding the purpose of these websites is that there is the possibility that the neoliberal arguments that were found are a calculation by the authors of these pages that this is the message that potential students want to see rather than a belief in the principles of the market. This is a question of intent that is beyond the scope of this study and is not necessary to address for at least two reasons. Firstly, the goal of this research is to see if neoliberal ideas and ideology have influenced universities in Canada and in the case of the CDA portion of the study, specifically looking at the university recruitment websites. This question does not require looking at intent. Secondly, even if the intent of using neoliberal language and ideas to market universities to potential students is simply a marketing ploy that does not reflect a change within universities, this is still an important finding. If historical institutions, like universities, must adapt their messaging to reflect a prevailing ideological system rather than other methods of valuating their purpose in society, then this is worth exploring because it demonstrates the dominance of that ideology.

### **Highly Affected**

The most obvious area to examine is the general purpose of the universities' homepages as it is the primary point of contact for an individual unfamiliar with the

university. The homepage serves as a virtual front door on the Internet. In this context, there are two basic audiences that a university homepage targets. The first is current students and faculty. Essentially, this kind of focused website would have links to common services or information that a student or a faculty member would require in their daily work. The second is specifically designed to represent the university in its best light to the outside world, and this would focus, to a degree, on potential students. However, a school's website must also appeal to a student's advisors, whether they are their parents or some other advisor who the student trusts, as they consider their options. For many students, the most influential advisor they might have would be a guardian, likely a parent or parents. With reference to the universities that represent a high degree of neoliberal themes and language, they are, almost without exception, aimed toward this second purpose of representing the university to the outside world. Moreover, because these websites have been developed as the virtual face of the university, they generally show design features that are extremely well polished and look like the webpage of a national or international brand. This includes features like a coordinated colour scheme, a large amount of graphics, animated graphics, and a variety of multimedia options that, when summed up, give a distinctive corporate appearance to the website. This adoption of the language of corporations in terms of branding and advertising tropes was remarked on in the arguments of Baudrillard (2005), Norris (2005), Ritzer (1998) regarding the implosion of the consumer identity into all aspects of life as discussed in Chapter 2.

***Branded websites.*** As an example of a university with a website that seems to be geared toward the outside world, the York University homepage provides an example of an outwardly focused recruitment style homepage. This outwardly focused recruitment

style homepage is different from university websites that are meant to service current students or faculty; York University's site gives the impression that it is primarily intended for those outside of the university. Beyond the 'glossy' nature of how the website has been designed, the homepage of the university is dominated by stories and links that are not particularly vital for current students, but are self-laudatory stories that would be expected on a purely recruitment-based website. For instance, at the time that I collected the data from York's homepage, their website is dominated by an article referring to a recent investment by Doug and Sandra Bergeron, the former being the CEO of Opus Global and an alumnus of York University. This article is representative of a trend found on other university websites that these articles are not necessarily written for the benefit of staff, faculty, or students, but is meant to show the university's dynamism and growth. This suggests that by having the homepage of the university focused on a positive image of the university for the general public, the university is, by definition, engaging in a marketing campaign for itself.

With this story specifically, there are a number of attributes that are representative of the tone and focus found in many of the other homepages that can be described as being heavily affected. The overall impression of this article is that of the programs offered by the university, it is the STEM disciplines (sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics) that are the most prized. Specifically, the emphasis seems to be on the application of these disciplines to the private sector. For instance, the article quotes Doug Bergeron, the York alumnus and CEO of Opus Global, who states that, "we want Canada's most promising engineers and entrepreneurs to thrive, to innovate, and to eventually change the world" (York University, n.d.). Of course, it is difficult to argue

against the idea of innovation and what can be assumed to be positive changes to the world, but it is important to notice the inclusion of the category of entrepreneur to a centre designed for engineering science. This tie-in of a business concept to a faculty of engineering is certainly noteworthy, particularly since the Dean of Engineering, in the same article, described the Bergeron's as "savvy investors" and this donation as being conceivably another smart investment. This story also speaks to the larger issue of how universities must seek outside support to fund expansion plans, athletics, scholarship programs and even basic operating budgets. The reliance on outside donors for major infrastructure builds on campus was discussed in Chapter 2 with the work of Lyall and Sell (2006) and Deiacio et al. (2012) who both describe the increasing need for universities to seek private funding.

Without focusing on the minutiae of this story from York University, the larger scale perspective is that the homepage of this university is almost solely dedicated towards branding York to the outside world with a seemingly small focus on serving the needs of students, faculty, or staff. In the case of York, there are some possible reasons for this emphasis. The university, at the time of this research, was successfully lobbying the provincial government to support their Markham expansion plan. In order to rally public opinion behind this expansion, the focus of the website would likely be altered. It is at least conceivable that this push towards expansion and the need for public support might explain the focus and tone of the homepage. Even the most successful companies seek to continuously expand their market-share and profits. It is easy to see why so many of these universities would focus on the outside world, which allows this process of expansion to occur, in order to garner strong and positive relationships with the general

public. Also, the emphasis of these pages might be affected by the funding climate, as discussed in Chapter 2, which has seen an ever diminishing supply of funds from provincial and federal governments.

The branding of university websites is found in all of the highly affected websites. For instance, the University of Waterloo's homepage is dominated by moving graphics that link to various self-congratulatory stories. Each of the three stories featured on the homepage all have to do with positioning Waterloo as a 'cutting edge' research university. Waterloo also stands out because in comparison to other university webpages, its homepage is a heavily 'branded' page using black and yellow (the school's colours) as the primary palette (University of Waterloo, n.d.). Additionally, Waterloo's slogan, "Ideas that change the world" dominates a large section of the homepage.

This is very similar to the homepage of Simon Fraser University that uses its slogan of "Engaging Students, Engaging Research and Engaging Communities" to anchor its page (Simon Fraser University, n.d.). While there are links that would be pertinent to current students and faculty, they are in plain red text off to the right hand side of the page along with a small header section. Quite obviously, the design of the homepage is an attempt to 'brand' the university with this slogan of 'engagement', a theme that is carried throughout the SFU recruitment pages. The University of Regina shares similar design elements as SFU, Waterloo, and York as the homepage is overwhelmingly designed to attract the attention of potential students. All of the fonts for those looking to find out more information or how to apply to the school are bright and draw the eye. The marketing slogan "Realize. It starts with you." (See Figure 1) is the

most prominent text on the page and is directly connected to the graphic content of the webpage.

Conceivably, every university would likely want to put their best foot forward, but when the purpose and utility of an institution's homepage is almost strictly meant for the consumption of the outside world and potential students, a great deal is said about the overall branding of a university. By adopting the language of corporations in terms of branding a website to make it seamless and sleek, the university is signalling acceptance that this is a dominant force in society. The message becomes indistinguishable from any other type of product. An implosion of meaning that Ritzer (1998) discussed can occur and universities become just another product.

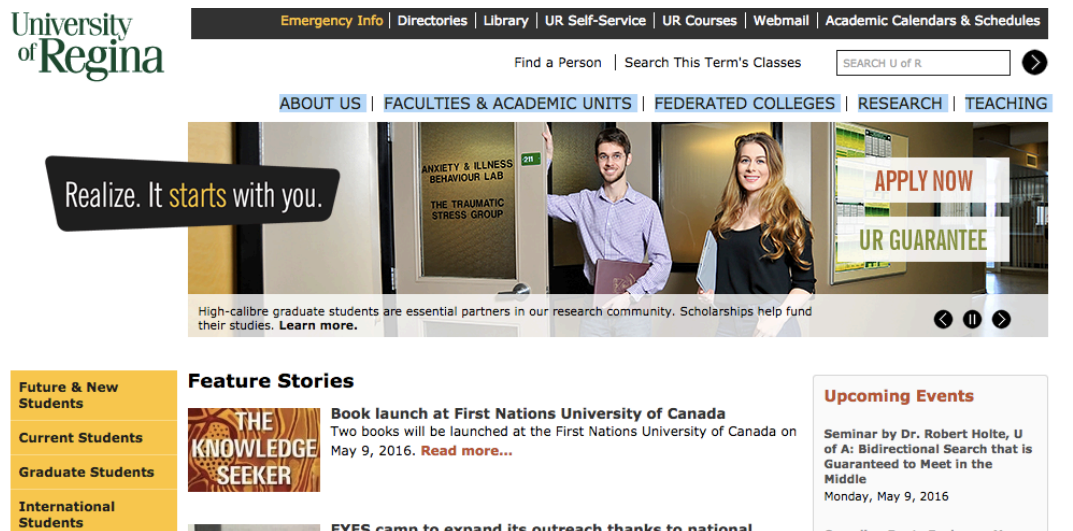


Figure 1. Note. From *University of Regina*, n.d.

**Real world.** A theme that united nearly all of the universities I have classified as being heavily affected by neoliberal discourse is that of emphasizing or arguing the supremacy of supposed real world education in comparison to the supposed theoretical education of the lecture hall. For instance, the University of Victoria has two major statements that anchor its page dedicated to prospective students. The first statement is

‘Find your fit’ which links to various program choices, and the second is ‘Real life learning’. ‘Real life learning’ is described by the university as, “Opportunities to work in your field, study abroad on international exchange or immerse yourself in a course at one of our field schools help prepare you for life as a responsible global citizen” (University of Victoria, n.d.). A few important details that stand out from this small but telling statement is the emphasis that conceivably being a responsible global citizen involves focusing solely on work and labour in an international context. Devoid from this view of citizenship is a mention of political engagement or reflective self-critique. Instead, it privileges the notion of education for action, but action only in the economic realm.

Throughout the University of Victoria’s website, this emphasis on the ‘real world’ is maintained. By using both its own descriptions and the experiences of former students’ education, the University of Victoria focuses on the claim that ‘real life learning’ is its chief distinguishing characteristic. For example, an article that concentrates on a former student, Robert Kowbel, who earned a degree in biology from Victoria, describes how his co-op opportunity helped him become more employable. Kowbel is quoted as saying, “I feel like my education was very theoretical until I did co-op and actually got to put the concepts to the test” (University of Victoria, n.d.). Of course, becoming employable will be the goal for many university students, but it is the insistence that learning is somehow unreal until it is brought into the job market that is important to note here. This insistence is at the very core of how the University of Victoria defines its educational difference in its website. In a section where the university defines itself by listing three key attributes of a University of Victoria education, two of the points relate to this ‘real life’ learning idea and the other aspect has to do with the amount of research being done by faculty.



Of particular note in this section of the website is the way these differences are described. It states that, “classroom learning is just one piece of the puzzle—at UVic our students are challenged to learn in new and dynamic ways.” The website goes on to say, “one in four UVic students takes part in our extremely popular co-operative education (co-op) program. By alternating academic terms with work terms, co-op students get real-world experience and graduate with a resume packed with relevant experience” (University of Victoria, n.d.). Beyond the overt message of this excerpt is the subtle use of terms such “dynamic” and the focus on newness, as a good in its own right, that plays into the type of neoliberal or corporate language used to tout the benefits of product or service. As if to make sure the viewers of this page are not in any doubt as to the focus of the University of Victoria, the text goes on to essentially make the same point in the third distinguishing characteristic of their education. Referring to students, the website states that:

You’ll find them complementing their studies with serious hands-on work experience through the co-op program or a practicum placement, testing their boundaries by traveling overseas on an international exchange, or embarking on a field school adventure with students from around the world. (University of Victoria, n.d.)

Again, the overt message is to argue the practicality of a University of Victoria education, but there are subtler tones to this statement in that there is a focus on internationalism that plays into a broader discourse of globalization. Certainly, the mention of hands-on work paints the narrative regarding the unreality of the classroom in stark details.

Throughout many of the websites studied, there was a strong rhetorical use of the idea of the ‘real world’ versus the academic world. Consistently the theme of the ‘real world’ as being the world of economic engagement is found throughout many of these heavily neoliberal discourse universities. This theme of the real world is not only restricted to the textual arguments in these websites, but also in the graphics and videos used to add ‘colour’ to the narrative, the most striking of which can be found on the Concordia University’s homepage (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2. Note. From Concordia University, n.d.*

In Figure 2, there are many themes coming together at once. Firstly, the image is of a male seemingly engaged in a technologies-based or industrial occupation that requires a work coat or a lab coat. With the text that is superimposed on the picture, there is the juxtaposition of lecture halls and ideas with the physicality of an industrial-technological workplace. This goes to the heart of the idea that there is something wrong or unreal

about education that has to be supplemented or even replaced by supposed ‘real world’ employment. Essentially, it is an argument that education has no validity until its ideas and training have been put to some use, specifically, to economic production, and that is the only valid outcome of a university education. Finally, there is the text found in the image, “Test your learning against real life” is very much in keeping with the general neoliberal outlook a supposedly simple image like this one projects. In sum, this image has many different facets of neoliberal discourse converging in one artefact.

The University of Waterloo unabashedly argues this position in a section on their website that is labelled “Who we are.” In this section, Waterloo states precisely what it considers to be the most important aspect of the education offered there in comparison to other universities. It claims to be the home of the world’s largest post-secondary co-operative education program and as such “embraces its connections to the world and encourages enterprising partnerships in learning, research, and commercialization” (University of Waterloo, n.d.). This statement is then paired with a further description of the university under the section titled “What we stand for” that argues:

Since it was launched in 1957 by a group of industrialists with a dream of changing the world through innovation and research, Waterloo has become an internationally recognized leader in entrepreneurship and innovation. From high-level cryptography that keeps your information secure, to the safety and sustainability of the water we drink, Waterloo continues to shape the world we share. (University of Waterloo, n.d.)

With both of these direct and purposeful statements, it is clear that what Waterloo argues is important for a university education is a focus on business, entrepreneurship, and

commercialization. Despite the fact that the university was founded in 1957 before the widespread adoption of neoliberalism, this focus on the economic impact of education is well suited to the current era. The supposed ‘real world’ and economically driven interests takes no account of introspection, reflection or deep inquiry, but emphasizes action and practicality. Its focus is on developing enterprising and innovative workers for a technological world, the implication being that an education at Waterloo will get students a job. Of course, at an institution as large and complex as Waterloo there are exceptions. In the case of Waterloo, the Perimeter Institute is meant to engage in basic theoretical physics research and drive primary knowledge in physics rather than produce technology or workers. Yet, the imagery and argument being made by Waterloo to the outside world revolves around the practicality of their education for employment rather than a pathway to explore the fundamental nature of reality.

The real world messaging is strongly seen on the University of Regina’s homepage. Regina has a unique guarantee that does set it apart from all of the other universities examined in this study. They have developed what they call the “UR Guarantee” program. This program includes the regular studies that a student would conceivably normally engage in, but also includes participation in academic workshops, advice on other student engagement opportunities for service on-campus, and participation in career development activities. The guarantee the university makes is that, “if you complete all elements of the UR Guarantee program and do not secure career-related employment within six months of graduation, you will be eligible to come back for another year of undergraduate classes free of charge (tuition and course fees)” (n.d.). The claim of this program is to, “ensure you are making the most of your University

experience” (n.d.). All of this together gets to the crux of the ‘real world’ argument that these universities make.

There is the potential argument that can be taken from this narrative that the reason to get an education at its institution is not because of the instruction received, but the lack of time a student will need to learn within the academic world. It is as if the marketing strategy is to concede that academic pursuits are of no real value, or that their value is determined solely by how lucrative a career a student will gain after graduation. Whether it is arguments like those put forward by the University of Victoria or the University of Waterloo that tout co-op programs, or the more overt messaging of the University of Regina that guarantees employment or a year of free tuition if the graduate is not employed within a year of graduating, these universities all send the same underlying message of future employment.

The real world narratives found in these websites have potential implications for the message they transmit to the outside world. It suggests that education is an end-based pursuit and that the value of an education is measured in its usefulness outside of itself. Aligned to the real world narrative is an understanding of education that is similar to the human capital ideal of education. The human capital ideal involves orienting educational outcomes to producing knowledgeable workers in the economy rather than a focus on a citizenship based model (Barr 2011, Marginson 2016, Walters 2004). This grounding of education in the world of economic usefulness transforms education primarily into transactional exchange tuition fees and time for the potential of a more lucrative future. Of course, this type of messaging may or may not impact the delivery and experience of education in any of these institutions.

**STEM.** This emphasis on the real world, as demonstrated by the University of Regina example, is directly tied to supposed practical forms of labour. This relates to a broader focus in education on the supposed STEM disciplines. STEM disciplines refer to science, technology, engineering and mathematics and any studies related to these fields. The universities that have been classified in this study as demonstrating a strong neoliberal discourse also demonstrate a focus on STEM learning.

One of the key ways this highlighting of STEM disciplines functions on these websites is by highlighting student success stories. Most of these universities have small interview style stories with either recent graduates, or soon to be graduates, as a way of letting students explain why they enjoyed their experience at the institution. Yet, most of these stories tend to focus on STEM discipline students. For instance, on the University of Windsor's website the recruitment slogan is "UWill..." and this is used to form a structure to the website where it links to differing ideas of what an education at Windsor will give a student. Of the five different ideas, three focus on small biographical stories featuring University of Windsor students, two of which focus on STEM discipline students. These include a story about an engineering graduate named Alaa Makke who participated in a co-op program that the website claims "paved his way to a job." The second features a chemistry/biology PhD graduate "who is a post-doctoral fellow at the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research." The third story of a non-STEM graduate contains a brief mention of how the student's work in visual arts can someday be applied to produce products (University of Windsor, n.d.). The advertising of STEM programs on its own does not necessarily reflect neoliberal ideas at play. However, the focus on STEM disciplines as with a practical outcome as defined in terms of value to industry and

personal economic value do reflect a neoliberal vision of education. This is similar to the ‘real world’ narrative as discussed earlier in that market forces and economic considerations are determining the value of education.

These examples from the University of Windsor are quite obvious in some ways but it is not always so easy to see. For example, Simon Fraser University has a recruitment video entitled “Are you SFU?” (Simon Fraser University, 2012) which features students giving a very sleek and well-produced series of single sentence statements about the university. Spliced into the frame as they speak are a number of moving graphics that reinforce what they are saying. The graphics they have chosen to highlight the statements include a light bulb, a gear, chemistry equipment, a satellite dish, a DNA molecule, and a rocket. All of these symbols have a great deal of resonance within pop culture and they speak to a specific version of intelligence and education that favours a STEM understanding of scholastic achievement (Simon Fraser University, 2012).

The University of Waterloo is much less subtle than Simon Fraser University. On the main recruitment page, there is a link entitled “Considering a health related profession?” This is important, as this is the only specific link to a set of disciplines available on the easily accessed recruitment pages. The link opens to a video that can be colloquially described as slick, just like the video on the Simon Fraser website. The ‘slickness’ is a result of graphical movement from one idea to the next. It opens with the rhetorical question “So you want to change lives through a career in health” (University of Waterloo, n.d.). It suggests that Waterloo allows students to study a subject they are passionate about, while working toward the student’s ‘dream profession’. As they say

‘dream profession’ it shows a graphical representation of an optometrist, a doctor, and a pharmacist. It suggests that staying on campus is all about connections, and the graphical representation of these connections is represented using the image of a molecule being connected by valence bonds. Beyond the impressive visuals of this video, it is clearly focused on selling the idea of the healthcare industry, rather than any conception of research. Moreover, in the section that describes what makes the University of Waterloo unique is the claim, “From quantum computing and nanotechnology to clinical psychology, engineering and health sciences research, ideas that will change the world are at the heart of who we are” (University of Waterloo, n.d.). In that self-description, all that was highlighted were not only essentially all STEM disciplines but mainly applied STEM disciplines.

The possible danger of a focus on STEM based education is that it instrumentalizes the goals of a university education. Especially with the focus on practical skills based and industry important disciplines, there is a danger of reducing education to a vocational pursuit only. Giroux (1999) warned about the vocationalizing of higher education for the benefit of corporate and private industry. STEM disciplines are clearly part of the historical role of universities and the impact of technological advancements has obvious benefits. Yet, there is a danger of elevating a particular vision of STEM disciplines to the detriment of legitimate non-STEM disciplines.

***‘State of the art’.*** Connected to the theme of STEM disciplines is the use of the terms ‘state of the art’ or ‘cutting edge’ or even ‘innovative’ to describe the style of learning, the facilities, and equipment available to students. Again, having new facilities is not necessarily problematic, but it is the implication that new facilities somehow



produce better learning and that traditional tools of learning are out of date that can be seen as playing into a wider neoliberal discourse. Such a focus on novelty is heavily exploited in the marketing of consumer products and has an *a priori* implication that newer is best.

The article that discusses the creation of the Bergeron Centre for Engineering Excellence from the York University website includes this statement, describing a fixation on technology and novelty that becomes telling:

This bold new home for engineering at York University defies conventional wisdom and gives students the opportunity to learn in ways that were unthinkable before the dawn of the information age. The \$90-million Bergeron Centre for Engineering Excellence won't offer your typical engineering school experience. The space has been designed to "flip the classroom" so that students will watch lectures online at home or in a café, and come to campus for active learning sessions with professors, classmates and mentors. (York University, n.d.)

Taken at its face value, the university suggests that this new space for learning is fundamentally different from any other offering they have. Its value is precisely that it is not traditional. It is undeniable that with the advent of personal computers, the Internet, and all of the other technologies available to students, the experience of a typical undergraduate in 2017 is different from that of a student from 25 years ago. Many lectures are found online, assignments might be submitted by email, and research is often done through virtual databases rather than more traditional methods using the physical resources of a university. However, does this necessarily make for a better education or experience? Exploring ways of teaching and learning that are based on technological

platforms and interfaces is beyond the scope of this paper but it should be clear that the message in the York announcement reflects a spirit of innovation and making the university experience similar to all other aspects of modern life. The implosion of services and expectations of a consumer society that was brought up by Ritzer (1998) and is reflected in York's advertising here. Ritzer's argument is that universities would replicate the services and experiences of a consumer society as the idea of the university became ever more commoditised.

The University of Windsor also makes this particular argument made by York about how the use of technology makes for a better education. In a recruitment video, the narrator explicitly uses the terms 'cutting edge' and 'state-of-the-art', to show how the educational experience at The University of Windsor is superior. Over the images of high technology and industrial scenery, the narrator states that:

At U Windsor, you'll work with cutting edge technology, side by side with professors and professionals creating change that will drive a better future, in the city that drives the world. With hands on access to state-of-the-art facilities giving you the tools to make the impossible, possible. To bring the invisible into view. To express your one of a kind vision or the skills to perform on a changing world stage. You'll build connections and break barriers. Together the Lancers are drafting their future. Together they are creating an unforgettable experience, hands on, world class, it all starts now. (n.d.)

The above script sells a particular idea of the education and the outcome of the education a student would receive at the University of Windsor. Foremost among this vision of education is technology. The technology celebrated has a specific meaning that has

political dimension when it is applied to a narrow function of creating products for economic gain.

The importance of the language used by these websites when discussing the ‘cutting edge’ of their facilities or the ‘state of the art’ tools available for students plays into what Fairclough (2000) describes as the narrative of progress needed for the implementation of neoliberalism. Progress is seen as process of modernization and a focus on progress in all faculties of life (p. 148). However, this is not to suggest that technological change is by its very nature neoliberal or that lack of technological adoption is a sign of resistance. Instead, it demonstrates that a focus on technology and self-described progress works into a larger narrative of neoliberalism.

**Research focus.** A similar theme that appeared in many of these websites concerns the importance of research conducted at the institution. The focus on research is related to the research prowess of a university in comparison to other institutions. In the case of Simon Fraser University, it is stated that, “in the place where innovative education, cutting-edge research and community outreach intersect, you’ll find Simon Fraser University” (n.d.). The link between the use of the terms cutting-edge or state-of-the-art to research plays into the wider discourse of education needing to be practical or useful to economic production. The usual context for this discourse is in the STEM disciplines and this is why these terms relate so concretely to the notion of progress of technology and novelty.

A legitimate question could be asked with regard to the relation of ‘cutting edge’ research that goes on at an institution and the actual impact these research activities would have on average undergraduate students. If the focus of the university is on

research, perhaps, there is an open question about how that will actually benefit their students. The practical impact that a heavy research schedule would have on many faculty members is that their teaching load would decrease as their funded research increases and to fill in the gap universities increasingly rely on sessional or adjunct professors to handle the lecturing duties. This drive towards research outputs for both prestige and external funding was discussed in Chapter 2 and was pointed out by authors such as Altbach (2011), Lindsay and Neumann (1987), and Slaughter and Rhoades (2004).

According to these authors and others, universities are under increasing pressure to prioritize their research activities. This might result in the decline in availability for lecturing if professors are encouraged to seek out and conduct externally valuable research. The actual impact on the teaching duties of these professors is contestable but the greater importance put on industry relevant research is important to note.

In this vein, Simon Fraser University discusses a member of their faculty whose research focuses on developing new brain diagnostics technologies and devices. At the conclusion of this article, the author makes a sweeping argument about how Simon Fraser University is trying to situate their research in the following manner:

Through the integration of its advanced research capacities with the frontline medical expertise of Surrey Memorial Hospital and the Fraser Health region, SFU is engaging the world's communities and economies in ground breaking medical innovations that improve lives. (n.d.)

There are a few key aspects to this conclusion that I would like to note. First, there is a connection of research at Simon Fraser to the 'frontline' concerns of medical

practitioners. This is similar to the theme of the ‘real world’ that was explored earlier, but in this case, it highlights the practical aspects of research. Further, such research is directly linked to a neoliberal outlook as it explicitly draws the connection both between research and the economy and the impact on the daily lives of others.

The University of Regina follows the pattern that Simon Fraser University demonstrates as it describes the programs and the research that is undertaken at their university. Their website states that:

The University of Regina provides a dynamic, innovative and supportive learning experience with a growing national reputation for excellence in teaching and research. The University’s comprehensive services and programs prepare students to excel in local and global communities and its research opportunities attract the best and brightest minds. (n.d.)

A few things contained in this paragraph are of note. Firstly, is the use of buzzwords such as ‘dynamic’ and ‘innovative’ that have a highly corporate meaning. These terms are so ubiquitous and overused in advertising that they are substantially void of meaning. Also, this paragraph mentions, in not so many words, the idea of the global market place by using the idea of preparing students to, “excel in local and global communities and its research opportunities attract the best and brightest minds.” One of the key ideas is that the research conducted by the university makes the education superior and this theme is then extended in a further paragraph that argues:

The University of Regina boasts thirteen research centres and institutes that enhance the teaching and research opportunities available on campus. Innovation Place Regina, located adjacent to the main campus, has produced synergies and

research partnerships with industry and government. The University-Industry Liaison Office, established through a joint venture with the City of Regina and the University, enables commercialization of research through technology transfer.

(n.d.)

Again, there is the direct link between research conducted by the university and corporate production. In the example from Simon Fraser University, the link was not so brazenly made, but in the University of Regina's example, there is a celebration of this link directly.

York University also engages in this discourse, connecting research to the corporate world. As has been commented on in the above pages there is a strong theme through the York website about connecting education to industry, and this continued as it discusses research implication and goals. For instance, in one section of the recruitment website that gives an overview of what a degree from this institution will provide the student, it states that:

A York U degree empowers graduates to thrive in the world and achieve their life goals through a rigorous academic foundation balanced by real-world experiential education. As a globally recognized research centre, York is fully engaged in the critical discussions that lead to innovative solutions to the most pressing local and global social challenges. York's 11 faculties and 28 research centres are thinking bigger, broader and more globally. (n.d.)

York, then, directly links its research programs to industry in a section where it argues in favour of a campus expansion by arguing that expansion would build community. This means:

Working together, forming partnerships, sharing knowledge and creating opportunities for commercialization and jobs will maximize research outcomes in areas as diverse as entrepreneurship, health, IT, literacy, education, culture, sustainability, and social justice. (n.d.)

There is no question that York is arguing that research programs will provide economic boons for the community, as well as enhance the educational experience of their students. However, the research that will evidently accomplish these goals is obviously rooted in industry and direct applications rather than more theoretical work and is almost unabashedly STEM based research that is being promoted.

The University of Waterloo, whose positioning has already been shown to focus on applied STEM disciplines, uses the same arguments about the connection between research, learning, and industry. The website states that:

In the heart of Waterloo Region, at the forefront of innovation, the University of Waterloo is home to world-changing research and inspired teaching. At the hub of a growing network of global partnerships, Waterloo will shape the future by building bridges with industry and between disciplines, institutions and communities. (n.d.)

Of course, whether or not it can accomplish these lofty goals is beside the point. The use of these arguments to attract students gives a particular and profound argument about what they may expect from their education. These themes that are found in the strong discourse of universities are by no means exhaustive, but they demonstrate a not so subtle message about education at these universities. This message is that education should be oriented toward the needs of the private sector.

**Moderately Affected**

In this section, I contrast the themes that I identified in the highly affected category against the patterns that I describe as being moderately affected. The universities that have been categorized as displaying a medium level of neoliberal discourse include Wilfred Laurier University, Brock University, Carleton University and the University of New Brunswick. This category is made up of websites that send mixed messages on the purpose of a university education and the type of education they claim a student will receive at their institution. Specifically, when I refer to the mixed messages that a university is sending concerning the purpose of a university education, I am referring to the language or messaging that displays both a neoliberal purpose of education and some arguments that have countering ideas at work.

Perhaps the most striking contrast is the overall intent of this group's homepages. In the previous grouping, nearly all of the websites' design elements pointed toward recruiting students or, at the very least, toward the outside world rather than to students and faculty who currently attend or instruct at the university. In this moderately affected group, nearly all of the university homepages contain design elements that serve current students rather than luring potential ones. For instance, Brock University's homepage is relatively straightforward, with the usual promotional stories from around campus that were found in universities with a high degree of neoliberal discourse. However, unlike those webpages, the emphasis on the Brock homepage seems to be mainly toward faculty and students rather than recruitment. The recruitment section is limited to a column of text running vertically down the left-hand side under the heading of "information," with



the rest of page dominated by links to student aid, libraries, faculty lists and other pertinent information for students currently attending the university.

The sole exception to this focus in the moderately affected group is found on the Carleton University homepage. This homepage seems to be geared toward recruitment. Carleton's website uses a graphics based interface to communicate. The sleek nature of Carleton's website mirrors the type of marketing campaign expected of a multinational corporation. Wæraas and Solbakk (2009), in their study of the branding of universities, state that, "branding efforts in academia are easily observable" (p. 450), citing examples of the use of vision statements, consistent design elements, and consistent themes throughout their promotional material. Such visuals are visible in Carleton's website. It is fair criticism to argue that this does not necessarily represent neoliberalism just because the university website is well executed and has strong design elements. However, it does suggest a large amount of focus on the image of the university being developed through advertising. In Baudrillard's (2005) logic, advertising determines reality in a corporate age. It is the adoption of this position by institutes of higher education that is so intriguing. The graphics that have been chosen for the homepage speak to a particular vision of education as being focused on STEM careers. For instance, the following screenshot from their homepage:

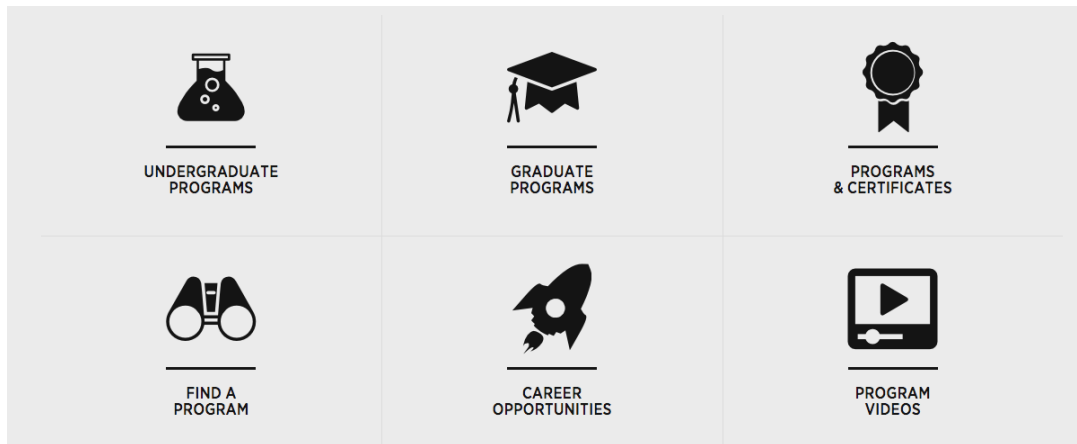


Figure 3. From *Carleton University, n.d.*

The graphic used to link to undergraduate programs is an Erlenmeyer flask and the career opportunities is a rocket. Markedly missing from the icons is a book that one might consider a fundamental part of even a scientific education. On their own, these style choices could be explained as artistic decisions with no underlying political or economic message. However, these design elements even if unintentionally, carry symbolic weight. The symbolic importance that the use of the Erlenmeyer flask and the rocket ship is of note because both of these symbols imply the primacy of science in higher education. Of course, these graphics were potentially chosen for their aesthetic power rather than a more profound statement on the hierarchy of studies at a university. Both of these images are iconic and contain symbolic power and weight. This is not to say that there are no other explanations for these choices and it is not to say that the sciences are not an important aspect of the history of universities. However, these symbols might also be understood as representing a focus on the sciences as part a broader discourse.

Despite this heavy neoliberal discourse on the homepage of Carleton University, the links that follow this opening display a mixed narrative of what kind of education a student can expect from Carleton. For example, one of the disciplines that are highlighted

in a recruiting video is the Bachelor of Music program. Students who are featured in the video represent their choice to study music by acknowledging the potential financial problems it may present in the future regarding finding employment. In this video, the student they interviewed states that, “it doesn’t really seem like a stable career path, but it turned out to be the best four years of my life” (Carleton University, 2014). It is possible for an observer to see this as an anti-commercialized or anti-neoliberal view of education. However, it is interesting that in a discussion about the love of studying music that the student brought up the very idea of employment. There is a tacit admission that education should be viewed in these terms. The key point is that Carleton used an advertising technique of the anecdotal interview to encourage students to attend their institution. This sort of ‘slick’ marketing technique of the anecdotal is the same kind of marketing that a strong neoliberal discourse university would use. Yet, Carleton focused on a different discipline than would be expected.

***Co-op programs.*** This example from Carleton University is mirrored in various ways by most of the universities that have been categorized as displaying a mixed neoliberal discourse. In a similar manner, Brock University focuses on their Co-op Program as a selling point for their university. For instance, in a section that is titled “Get the most out of your degree at Brock”, the first piece of advice given to students is to participate in a Co-op program. Co-ops are described as allowing, “you to explore different career possibilities, discover what interests you, develop key industry contacts, and find the type of career that’s right for you — a huge competitive advantage” (n.d.). Thus, concerning language deployed, it is clear that Brock places special emphasis on the marketability of a student’s education. Counterbalanced to this emphasis is an adamant

statement about the need for academic rigour as well as employability as expressed by stating:

Brock takes pride in their committed, versatile and motivated students. Our students are selected from a broad pool of candidates and accepted on the basis of academic performance. Once admitted to a Co-op program, students must meet Brock's rigorous academic standards in order to continue in the Co-op option.

(Brock University, n.d.)

In other Co-Op programs encountered in the heavily affected group, no such statement is found in their literature, and it seems to speak to a different focus for education at Brock University. Undoubtedly, academic performance and rigour are important to the University of Waterloo, for instance, but there is a substantive difference in simply assuming such standards and articulating them.

There is similar mixed messaging at the University of New Brunswick when the value of its university education is described. In some instances, arguments about the monetary value of a university degree are offered and, in other cases, arguments are made about students needing to follow their interests, rather than looking for a marketable degree. Specifically, the University of New Brunswick claims that the average graduate with a university degree can expect to make 1.3 million dollars more over the course of a 40-year working career, compared to someone who has a high school diploma. This direct message on the economics of education is bolstered by a number of pages linked to finding careers and employment post graduation.

However, intermixed with an economic view of education is an equally strong discourse encouraging students to follow their passions and interests. For instance, the website claims that:

Planning your career takes time, but the rewards are great. By basing your plans on what you like to do and what matters to you, you'll greatly improve your chances of finding the career you want. By finding your passion in your studies you will likely find a career you want. (University of New Brunswick, n.d.)

Considering the examples from other universities that seemingly favour STEM disciplines, either subtly or directly, this advice to choose disciplines based on the students' areas of interest rather than a strategic choice about what might be a more employable skill set, represents a different tone.

***Degree choice and emphasis.*** The argument that students should choose a discipline they are passionate about is not an aberration on the University of New Brunswick's website. Consistently, the message is that for a student to be successful in both their studies and their future lives, the best approach is to find a personally engaging area of study and dive into it. Such an approach can be considered a counter-narrative to the neoliberal argument about education needing to be marketable and economically focused. For instance, the University of New Brunswick details the 'Top 10 Career Myths' as a way of helping students determine what kind of an education and what degree they might pursue. Some of the advice that is provided on this list includes statements like, "one major can lead to many different careers, and one career can be reached through many different majors," "the job title that leads to these benefits may not be obviously related to the title of your degree or academic major," and "what you enjoy

and what is important to you about life and work should also be taken into consideration” (University of New Brunswick, n.d.). The overwhelming advice given to students who are considering their majors is at odds with a neoliberal discourse about making educational decisions and experiences solely based on how lucrative the student might expect their career to be. Indeed, the website even gives the advice against choosing a major based on the occupations that are currently occupations that are in demand. It states that, “the job market fluctuates constantly. Take the dot.com boom in the late 90's that led to a bust just a few years later, leaving thousands of workers without a job” (University of New Brunswick, n.d.). Instead, it advises students to pursue their passions and interests, and with some planning argues that the student will end up in much better place than working at a job that they are qualified for but not particularly interested in doing.

***Institutional positioning.*** This is an overwhelming theme from most of the university websites in this middle category. They seem to describe their institutions in a more traditional light in that they do not immediately associate education with economic production or the purpose of their institution in terms of the production of economic resources. The premiere example of this focus on education for its own right comes from Wilfred Laurier University. Many universities have sections that present an autobiographical account of their institution. This type of section was examined earlier when discussing the University of Waterloo’s commitment to STEM disciplines and corporate partnerships. However, on the Wilfred Laurier University website, the institution and its philosophy is described in the following manner:

A Laurier education is about building the whole person: mind, body and spirit.

We believe that your university career must lead to more than just a job to be

considered a success; Laurier creates engaged and aware citizens in a culture that inspires lives of leadership and purpose. (n.d.)

This statement could be seen as another way of differing Laurier from other universities, yet, over the entirety of the website, the values espoused here are consistently seen. Note the use of the term “A Laurier education” which is a form of branding and a subtle use of language that is deployed in a similar manner to a corporation attempting to build a brand around the experience a customer has when visiting their stores. It is the use of language to differentiate the university from its competitors.

In terms of the physical facilities that Wilfred Laurier has to offer, high technology is not emphasized, but rather the size of classrooms, the warmth of the community and the engagement each student can receive from their professor making the statement, “no matter how many students we have, you won’t find a closer-knit group at any university, anywhere” (Wilfred Laurier University, n.d.). Further into the description of the types of programs students can participate in, volunteerism is promoted as a way of developing the whole citizens they referred to in their mission statement. It is argued that, “All the good work you do outside of class brings its own rewards – you get to build a stronger community and improve yourself, too – but there’s another bonus: employers love it” (Wilfred Laurier University, n.d.). Of course, within this statement there is the connection to future employment, yet, they conclude this section by claiming that:

Surveys show 70% of our upper-year students participated in community service or volunteer work during their time here. Whether you’re doing it as part of a class or just to get involved, volunteering is a habit that sticks with Laurier students long after they leave university. (n.d.)

Compared to the sections that dealt with co-op programs and other work experience arguments, Wilfred Laurier University has a marked difference in terms of what students should do in their spare time and how this can develop their character and connection to the wider community. This kind of language is not found in abundance on the websites that have a strong neoliberal discourse.

In many of the websites, it is not only the inclusion of certain arguments and imagery but it is the exclusion of others that should be noted. Wilfred Laurier University provides a discourse which is hardly seen in any other website, and this is telling. It is telling because other universities seemingly do not believe in the use of education to develop a well-rounded individual connected to their society, their history, and their communities as an effective narrative to promote their education. It is this sort of narrative that encapsulates the older vision of what a university should do for both the individual student and for society in general. Championing this older vision of education as discussed in Chapter 2 are authors like Bloom (1987) and Côté and Allahar (2011). Despite the disagreement between Bloom (1987) and Côté and Allahar (2011) regarding their preferred outcomes for education, they agree that an education must include a deep connection to a student's society and it must teach them to be a better citizen and person through education.

### **Slightly Affected**

The final category is that of slightly affected. The universities that comprise this group represent a smaller group than either the highly affected or moderately affected groups. This category is made up of the University of Guelph, Ryerson University, and Memorial University of Newfoundland. Because this category is relatively small in



comparison to the heavily affected and the moderately affected, I examine each of these universities individually. As outliers to the dominant trends, they are significant because they provide a countering account of how education is depicted on university websites.

The University of Guelph's website seems to highlight a focus on the academic prowess of its educational experience over that financial success. As opposed to some other universities, the Guelph homepage is very much geared towards current students as opposed to being a marketing hub for future students. The most obvious sign that this webpage is mainly meant for current students is that it includes a weather report for Guelph. Of course, to some who live in the north of Canada that could be a marketing strategy on cold winter days, but generally, this should be seen as a sign that the main purpose of this homepage is to service current students. It is possible to interpret the lack of an obvious recruiting focus at Guelph in terms that they are well established and do not need to actively recruit students in the same way other universities might. If this is the case, this certainly seems to be counter to the colloquial notion of corporations needing to grow or die.

The main recruiting page reflects the overall strategy of marketing the University of Guelph-based on academic rigour and the educational experience a student could expect. For instance, on the page dedicated to prospective students and that links to the 'Future Students' tab on the homepage, there is a statement about the University of Guelph:

Guelph attracts students who rank among Canada's best, enabling us to provide a challenging academic environment and an educational experience that is diverse

and emphasizes a collaborative approach to learning. We are seeking students who pursue excellence and who strive to be leaders. (n.d.)

This statement sets the tone for most of the recruitment documents found throughout the University of Guelph's website. It also uses the sort of slogans found throughout advertising campaigns and corporate promotional material. Despite this, compared to some of the universities that were grouped into the high degree of neoliberal discourse category, the concepts of academic excellence and leadership based on this type of excellence demonstrate a marked difference. Perhaps the University of Guelph is attempting a different type of marketing by focusing on traditional academic goals for education. Yet, words matter in advertising and if the concepts of Baudrillard (2005) with regard to the primacy of advertising and the eclipse of reality by the image created through advertising are taken to their logical conclusion, then the image that the university projects is the reality of the university.

The University of Guelph furthers this autobiographical description of the university by arguing that, "The University of Guelph offers a wide variety of academic programs ranging from undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate degrees to diploma and certificate programs. We also offer courses for those seeking to upgrade their skills or develop their interests" (n.d.). This description of the educational opportunities at the University of Guelph is relatively straightforward, but of particular interest is the term upgrade, as it is a fraught term associated with the business world. It lends itself to the idea of education as a way of building a résumé rather than a pursuit worthy of interest in its own right. It promotes an almost mechanical understanding of education that tends to negate the type of education that Guelph had just championed earlier.

*Community of learners.* However, this statement is a seeming outlier from the general tone that Guelph has demonstrated with a special focus on the type of education they provide. For example, the right side of the future students' webpage is devoted to profiling current students and their reasons for first choosing and then enjoying their education at Guelph. Overwhelmingly, the brief statements made by each student, presumably edited from longer discussions or scripts, is that Guelph focuses on supporting the academic and social growth of each student. One student speaks about the "incredibly supportive community of students, TAs and professors," another speaks of the "chance to work closely with their professors and learn from a hands-on approach," and yet another student speaks about his experience as a student athlete saying that the "support system of coaches, counsellors and faculty members help ensure that each athlete is equipped to meet all athletic and academic expectations" (n.d.). Overall, this section emphasizes the network of support each student experienced at Guelph and this is important as these statements had been specifically chosen to reinforce what the university wishes to emphasise about its education. Evidently, the main focus that Guelph elected to emphasize is their attention to student education through supportive instructors, professors, and small class sizes.

The focus on the community of education available at Guelph is echoed in the admissions page main text. In this section of the website, they claim that at the University of Guelph, "we are committed to changing lives and improving life, beginning with your quality of life and extending to the welfare of the world." This is followed by:

Come to the U of G and be yourself in our welcoming, caring and engaging community. Enjoy the spirit of innovation, collaboration and social consciousness

that invigorates our research and enlivens our campus. You'll find yourself inspiring and transforming lives beyond your own! (n.d.)

Again, the University of Guelph positions their vision of education as one that is committed to a public good on a global scale and creates a sense of community.

This belief is further expanded upon in another section of the Guelph website where it is stated that:

At Guelph, your education is more than just classroom learning - we will prepare you to be a successful citizen in our world. Beginning in your first year, you will be at the heart of our learner-centred, collaborative approach to learning in a challenging and dynamic university environment. (n.d.)

This statement connects ideas of global citizenship with an argument about the learner-centered approach to education. Of course, the statement can be read in a number of different ways. For instance, the focus on internationalism and the creation of a global citizenry could be thought as an argument for globalization that fits a narrative of neoliberalism. However, given the context of much of the other parts of Guelph's recruitment pages, a neoliberal interpretation of this focus on a global citizenship might be too much of a stretch.

**Rankings.** Further into Guelph's website, some neoliberal arguments are evident. For example, it makes reference to how well Guelph has done on various national and international university rankings. Specifically, it refers to its performance in *Maclean's*, *Times Higher Education*, *QS* and *QS Stars Rankings*, *International Student Barometer*, *Academic Ranking of World Universities*, *The Globe and Mail Student Report Card*, and *ReSearch Infosource*. While university ranking in studies such as these are obvious

grounds for any university to boast, such instrumentalized reduction of education based on third party appraisals can be compared at the micro-level to standardized testing found in the K-12 system. However, it should be noted that the University of Guelph was not the only university to use these arguments about its rankings in various polls and surveys. Other universities that did likewise included Concordia University, Wilfred Laurier University, the University of Waterloo, and the University of Victoria.

***Buildings.*** In a similar vein, the University of Guelph also demonstrates the sort of fetishization of new buildings on campus as a sign of excellence in education. By fetishization, I refer to the implied significance of novelty and ever expanding campuses that seem to be a mania for both academic institutions and institutions at large. Rarely is there an explanation for why a brand new building will improve education. However, this seems to be taken for granted and the argument that new facilities equal a better education is implied.

For instance, the website continuously refers to the dollar amount of each new building or renovation along with how much funding the university receives for research. Moreover, the fields of research that were chosen to be highlighted are all science-based. This consists of references to the school of engineering, physical science, biology, computational science, and specifically the Biodiversity Institute of Ontario that is described as the world's first centre for high-volume DNA barcoding. The one building that is specifically devoted to research or a science faculty also speaks to the aforementioned technological fetishism. The University of Guelph describes the physical building that houses the departments of engineering, physical science, computational science, and the Biodiversity Institute of Ontario as teaming with "electronic white

boards, laptop sound, picture and wireless internet and high luminance video/data projector” (n.d.).

This focus on technology as the principle highlight of an educational facility plays into the larger neoliberal argument that more technology is better in its own right. The technological equivalent that bigger is better focuses merely on the expenditures on technology rather than the content of the education. Taken in context, the University of Guelph’s focus on education for its own right and the experience of the student rather than their potential employability is a consistent theme throughout the website. Because of this, it stands in marked difference from the previously examined websites.

Along the same lines, Ryerson University has focused their recruitment argument on ideas of student experience and the development of the student through their education. Again, just as with the University of Guelph, Ryerson University’s homepage is most definitely designed for current students and faculty. It is functional rather than promotional and certainly is not a recruitment website.

***Student experiences.*** The actual recruitment page of Ryerson University is a relatively modest webpage without the slogans that some of the other universities feature. The central marketing campaign seems to be built around the idea, “Ryerson University – Take your learning to a whole new level – come see for yourself”. The website is consistent in approaching the promotion of their university by advancing the idea that student life is conducive to learning and exploring the world. Even though Ryerson uses the figure of a current student or recent graduate quote to describe the type of education they received or are receiving, it chose a quote from a current student to describe his experiences at Ryerson. The student stated that:

Small classes, great professors and the myriad of opportunities available to students create an incubative environment. With the skills gained from my program, I created a gesture-activated smart shoe and am currently working on a touchscreen-based smart pillow that wakes a user up at the optimal time. (n.d.)

Within this description, the student highlighted an entrepreneurial endeavour to create various apps. However, he goes on to argue that it was the quality of education based on interaction and the availability of his professors rather than jobs prospects as a result of attending Ryerson that made the difference for him. It is possible that in some of the other examples of similar student stories from other institutions were meant to communicate a similar idea of the importance of the connection between students and faculty that made the education exceptional but that was simply not effectively communicated. However, this is somewhat beside the point. The intent of the authors of these websites is not the concern of this study, the actual message as found on the websites is the subject matter being studied.

Further, the majority of the recruitment information is focused on student experiences through their education and the uniqueness of a university centered in Toronto. Ryerson's argument is that, along with the student life opportunities available to Ryerson students, the in-class education is greatly supplemented by the geographic reality of the physical campus. Again, this is different from many other universities in that Ryerson is focused not only on the supposed value of the degree once it has been obtained, but also in the process of education especially for undergraduates.

For example, they use the term the "Toronto advantage" to describe the uniqueness of a Ryerson education. This advantage is defined in the following manner,

“Ryerson University is in the heart of downtown Toronto, Canada's largest city. The University's location is ideal for serving both the Canadian and international community” (n.d.). This description of the university, as found on the website, is elaborated by explaining various cultural and entertainment amenities in proximity to the campus along with the experience of living in Canada’s largest city. However, at no point is it suggested that a key factor in the “Toronto advantage” is the concentration of business and co-op opportunities for Ryerson students. This stands in sharp relief to some other universities close to the GTA that especially single out their proximity to Toronto regarding marketability to potential employers.

Ryerson does encourage potential students to download their recruitment app, but this goes beyond the focus of this research project as it is solely concerned with university websites. However, with respect to the stated recruitment strategy as available online, Ryerson stands out in that it does not reflect many of the neoliberal tropes that one would expect from a university. Instead, it seems to be pushing the concept of a highly experiential education wherein the physical location of the school is an important aspect of the education.

***The broader community.*** Memorial University also uses the theme of the physical location of the university. For example, in one of the only uses of the type of slick marketing that can be found on Memorial University’s recruitment page, it has produced a video to advertise the best aspects of the university (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2014). The video shows a male student looking over a science textbook outdoors and then his digital watch goes off and he proceeds to hook onto a zip-line and zip-line down into a valley. The video then goes out of focus with the words “The



Ultimate Study Break” in white font. The obvious meaning is that at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, a student can be immersed in amazing scenery and amazing recreation facilities as a matter of routine of being a student at Memorial.

The idea of the location of the university is furthered by the unique funding arrangements available as a consequence of how the province of Newfoundland and Labrador supports post-secondary education. The website states that:

Our provincial government continues to subsidize tuition, giving us one of the lowest tuition fees in the country. That means it is more affordable for local, national and international students to come to Memorial. Combine that with the fact that St. John's has one of the lowest cost of living rates of all the capital cities in Canada and you'll realize that you can afford to go east. (n.d.)

The celebration of government subsidies for higher education is conceivably an interesting point of pride given the age of austerity and the dismembering of government subsidies to universities that have been a hallmark of the past 20 years of Canadian higher education. Memorial furthers this argument of thrift by stating that, “One of the most common questions that parents and students ask is ‘How much is University going to cost me?’ You will find that Memorial University offers a quality education at an affordable rate”. Again, the argument centers on a quality education as the stated goal of an education rather than a career.

The experience of education is also put on center stage when discussing the residences and housing available through Memorial University. Its website states that, “Living in Memorial's student dormitories is your chance to form lifelong friendships while embarking on a new academic adventure” (Memorial University of Newfoundland,

n.d.). Again, students' experiences are highlighted, along with the academic focus of an education. Thus, Memorial University of Newfoundland's recruitment webpage displays a very low degree of neoliberal discourse.

## **Conclusion**

The overwhelming impact of examining these 14 websites is that the approach to recruiting and interacting with the outside world is by no means uniform. However, in this chapter, I described three primary groupings that I discerned across all of the universities that I included in my analysis. The heavily affected websites are the most evident in their use of neoliberal ideas and speech. These universities that included York University, the University of Waterloo, Simon Fraser University, the University of Regina, the University of Victoria, Concordia University, and the University of Windsor are typified by consistent appeals to the lucrative employment opportunities, connections to industry, and even overt statements about the value of education in purely market-based terms. The interface tends to be rich in graphics and video content. The focus of the website seemingly is towards servicing outside interests rather than the benefit of students or faculty. In sum, the websites that fall into this category tend to be very similar to a corporation's website in that there is an obvious brand being established throughout the experience of navigating each part of the website.

In contrast, the slightly affected websites, which, in this categorization scheme, are the least affected, tend to be far less branded. The slightly affected websites included Ryerson University, the University of Guelph, and Memorial University. The content and arguments of why a student should attend their institution are mostly focused on student experiences and the joy of learning. Typically, these websites are seemingly focused on

servicing the needs of current students and faculty rather than projecting an image of the university to people outside of the institution. Perhaps some of these qualities may be attributed to a failure of execution on the part of the people who constructed the website, but there are some overt arguments made in these websites that the quest for learners at a university ought to be due to genuine curiosity. Again, the intent of the authors and creators of these websites is not the issue being studied. Instead, it is the actual message that is communicated. Therefore, even if it were an error of execution, the net result is that the message is as it is offered. These websites also tend to pay each discipline an equal amount of respect rather than privileging STEM-based disciplines and careers.

The middle category of moderately affected included the websites of Wilfred Laurier University, Brock University, Carleton University and the University of New Brunswick and typically showed some high production values in terms of the interface and general aesthetic experience. In some instances, the arguments about education can be seen as neoliberal, in other instances, these universities may make arguments counter to this narrative. Ultimately, what was observed in these websites were mixed arguments that were difficult to categorize as being exclusively neoliberal or not.

The net effect of thoroughly examining these 14 websites was that there were discernable and clear differences between the heavily affected and slightly affected categories. This difference was noticeable and would likely be evident to even a casual user of the website. These differences would be hard to describe as anything less than intentional. While they may not necessarily represent a tangible difference in educational philosophy at any one university, they certainly provide an obvious difference in both tone and content on the website itself. This intentionality is necessary, as it would

undoubtedly influence the way in which prospective students might understand the purpose and outcomes of education at each of these institutions. Certainly, the main function of a website is to communicate certain ideas about what an organization stands for to the public.

The insights gained from the website analysis, which was done before the interview portion of this study that is the focus of the next chapter, helped provide some grounding in the type of issues that will be encountered through the interviews. Some of the very same ideas examined throughout this chapter were brought up during the interviews, neither planned nor coordinated consciously. It developed quite independently and helped reinforce some of the nascent ideas evident as a result of the website analysis.

## **Chapter 5: The Interviews**

The overall research question of this study is, “In what ways does neoliberalism influence Canadian universities?” From this primary question, I explored two more focused research questions. The first question is, “How do universities include neoliberal discourse in their recruitment websites? If they do, in what ways?” The second question being, “In what ways might professors see the effects of neoliberalism in their daily activities as educators, researchers, and members of the university community?”

This chapter presents the findings in a thematic fashion in a similar manner as Chapter 4. Doing so involves following the procedure previously referenced and laid out by Ely, et al. 2006. Their process involves multiple steps including,

1. Study and re-study the raw data to develop detailed, intimate knowledge.
2. Note initial impressions.
3. List tentative categories.
4. Refine categories by examining the results of steps 2 and 3 and returning to the entire database of step 1.
5. Group data under the still-tentative categories and revise categories if needed.
6. Select verbatim narrative to link the raw data to the categories.
7. Study results of step 6 and revise if needed.
8. Write theme statements for each participant from my best attempt to speak from her/his point of view by linking data in and across categories.
9. Integrate findings about each person.
10. Compare findings for all the persons for commonalities or patterns, differences, and unique happenings.

11. Repeat the entire procedure for each focus and/or question that is pertinent to the study. (p. 209)

This process helped find commonalities as well as disagreements from the various interviews.

The respondents were all professors who specialize in the sociology of education, the philosophy of education, or critical pedagogy. The interviews were conducted from the December 2014 to June 2015 in accordance with the availability of each participant. In total, there were nine participants. The participants were made up of 6 men and 3 women. As I explained in Chapter 3, the reasoning for this focus of disciplines was based on the idea that some participants were more likely to be consciously reflexive about the culture and practices of their group (O'Reilly, 2008). The approach was to treat every interview as a collaborative event. The term "collaborative event" is meant to denote the relationship that was intended between the various participants and myself. Drawing on Johnson (1990) and Spradley's (1979) work, I conceived that the interviews were to be a collaborative event between researchers, avoiding the research-subject dynamic.

To facilitate what were intended to be broad conversations done in a relaxed and inviting style, I employed a series of guiding questions. Including:

1. What does the term 'neoliberalism' mean to you and how much importance do you believe it has in society?
2. In higher education, what do you identify as the effects of neoliberalism? Do you see these effects as beneficial to students and, ultimately, to society? In what way or ways?

3. As an educator, what do you believe your roles and responsibilities might be to students?
4. What are some of the general purposes of university education to students and society?
5. Over the course of your career, do you feel that neoliberal ideas have become more or less persuasive and pervasive?
6. [If they describe negative effects,] Are there ways you actively resist neoliberal effects on the university in your practice as an academic?
7. Is neoliberalism a topic of conversation among your colleagues? Can you describe instances of when these conversations took place and the general content of them? Is it addressed or discussed in faculty meetings and/ or Faculty Association meetings? Or, does neoliberalism impact the work you do, or don't do, in the university?

As stated in Chapter 3, question 5 could be answered in a binary fashion, and question 6 could possibly not apply depending on the respondents' points of view. However, in both cases, the answers were expanded upon in each conversation. The purpose of the conversation was to provide context and insight from the professors with regard to their potential experiences with neoliberal ideology in their professional lives.

### **Dissent**

I would like to highlight a respondent who did not wish to be interviewed and instead exchanged emails with me. His response was highly critical of the notion of neoliberalism, the overuse of the term, and the importance placed on neoliberalism within academia. His response represents a dissenting opinion held by some academics who

would not agree to participate in the study. I gave him the pseudonym Logan and, with his written permission, decided to include nearly the entirety of his initial response here.

Logan writes:

I'm also skeptical about your project although I clearly do not really know where you are going with it. As an example I'd suggest that "neo-liberalism" never did anything, just as culture never "does" anything. Such talk is simply misleading, like asking what the hammer did when a nail was hammered in.

I also tend to be very skeptical of stereotypical slogans, like "neo-liberalism," which really functions primarily as a term of abuse. If one is serious about doctrines or ideologies, one ought to study them in a particular, historical way. Historically, there were a number of strands of "liberalism" and comparing and contrasting them to current versions, as identified with particular spokespersons and texts, it is necessary to know what one is talking about. Otherwise it's all more or less like saying that bad things are the work of the "devil," who is apparently responsible for a lot but is never caught in the act.

Finally, higher education and social services more generally, are in difficult economic times for fairly obvious reasons. Governments around the world face difficult choices about cutting welfare or services, including education, healthcare, and pensions, or raising taxes. Much of the ideological heat on both sides comes from not facing these difficulties in a specific, direct, and fair manner. This economic tension is largely due, I believe, to the baby boom



population bulge and the invention of the pill. These resulted in a large boomer bulge in population and subsequent relative decline as women around the world had fewer children later in life, i.e. lower fertility. The result is a large older population that is expensive in terms of health care and pensions, and politically potent, and a relatively smaller, younger population that are less powerful politically, not only because they don't vote as often, but also because cutting health care and pensions create immediate pain while cutting education only creates long term pain.

So....neoliberalism is just a slogan, a term of abuse, and has done nothing, although politicians and interested parties on various sides have promoted various doctrines, many of which divert from addressing the issues facing us because no one wants to tackle a painful and unpopular issue. Then again, maybe the devil really is behind it all..... (personal communication, March 03, 2015)

The core criticism in Logan's response is that neoliberalism has become a term of abuse, or perhaps an abused term, used in many imprecise ways. His argument is that he has found neoliberalism to be used by some academics and critics whenever they encounter something they find objectionable. Fundamentally, Logan seemingly sees the difficult decisions that administrators make due to very real and difficult budgetary limitations. He gave voice to a potential view of neoliberalism that is highly doubtful of its existence or, at least, questions the overuse of the term.

His view, in the context of the following interviews, is somewhat exceptional because of the strongly worded scepticism that was not found in the views of the other respondents. To be clear, there were differing views of the importance of neoliberalism in the academy from the respondents and some certainly were sceptical of the impact of neoliberalism on their practice as university professors and these views will be discussed.

### **Defining Neoliberalism**

Almost every respondent provided a definition that locates neoliberalism as both a somewhat abstract concept and as a force that acts on individuals. Thus, for each participant, there was, for lack of a better term, an academic definition and then an explanation or elaboration of that definition with a more personal contextualization of neoliberalism. For instance, Sophia spoke about neoliberalism as a return to classical concepts of individualism and rationality that were the hallmarks of both the Enlightenment and early liberalism. She stated that:

I understand it [neoliberalism] sort of as a return, in a way, to liberalism, but with variations for these times. With neoliberalism seeing a shift from a focus on government, say within the welfare state where government was making decisions and making sure people were cared for and more explicitly out there in the public domain, to a focus on governance.

In this somewhat technical response, a number of the main ideas are brought up, including the concept of the public domain. It is interesting that this notion of the public comes up as it is a critical term when discussing the impact of neoliberalism as it denotes a somewhat oppositional concept to that of the market that was also developed in the Enlightenment and early liberal thought. Sophia's definition is reminiscent of Friedman's

(1990, p. 67) argument, as discussed in Chapter 2, that government restrictions on individual economic freedoms inevitably end up affecting political freedoms. It is a slight departure from the idea of positive rights to a belief in negative rights.

The second component of Sophia's response provides an interesting twist on defining neoliberalism. She argues that we should focus on neoliberalization as opposed to neoliberalism as neoliberalization denotes the continually moving nature of neoliberalism. Sophia describes her position in the following manner:

I have tended to shift toward talking about neoliberalization rather than neoliberalism. Just to take up the point that there is no one thing that is neoliberalism. You know that it is variegated depending on national policy context or local conditions, other policies, or other parties or culture or other things. I do think that there is sort of a collection of practices and policies, which make up neoliberalism but that they are shifting, and you can't put your finger on them exactly and they manifest themselves in different ways and in different contexts. The focus on market based competition, regimes of new public management, and privatization are all different takes on tendencies and trends that you see happening. They don't take the same exact form. So, you can't say "Aha neoliberalism has A, B, C and D." Maybe you have to say it has a variation of A B and part of C and doesn't really do D at all because "such and such" is true in this case. (March 31, 2015)

In this response, Sophia highlights a major aspect of neoliberalism, mainly, the plastic nature of the term. There is certainly a large body of theory and practice to place neoliberalism into a general sphere of policies and beliefs. There is a certain amount of

imprecision in its use. Logan may disagree that there is any such thing as neoliberalism, but the lack of clear definition and precise use of the term makes his argument difficult to rebut considering the sometimes sloppy use of the term neoliberalism by many of its critics.

Despite these claims, Sophia's response provides a counterpoint to the critique of the imprecision of the definition of neoliberalism. Emma reinforces this view of neoliberalism by stating that it is unlikely to find ideologies being expressed in explicit ways. Emma puts it in the following way:

So whenever an ideology is at play, you can see the ideology by examining the tiny textured moments of everyday life. In other words, what does my day look like? What kind of things do I do and out of what kind of larger structural systems is it coming that this is what I am doing with my day? (May 12, 2015)

Here, Emma highlights that apart from the formal definitions of neoliberalism, it is the lived experience of ideology that reveals how ideologies truly function. This echoes the discussion of Foucault's notion of power being best understood as a dynamic force. This was the tendency of most of the respondents who quickly shifted from giving precise definitions of neoliberalism to explaining how neoliberalism impacts their practice as educators, academics, and researchers. Emma is arguing that neoliberalism shapes the world the respondents live in and the options available to them. Liam made an interesting analogy arguing:

Another way of thinking of neoliberalism is that it's this train that we're all riding on. We can't think we are outside of it or that we can resist it but on one level we're on the train and it's moving down the tracks. (May 7, 2015)

He went on to state that neoliberalism works as shorthand for a whole host of changes. However, he said that these changes broadly privilege market logics and exchange as the preferred mechanism of management. Indeed, it is this focus on management that Liam considers brings the potential root of much of the discussion around neoliberalism. Specifically, he believes that the deeper condition is postmodern performativity. This idea that Liam advocates involves a move in management culture in both the public and private sectors towards regular evaluation of the output of the workers and uses a wide variety of metrics to produce such assessments. An apt example that Liam discussed is the regime of testing that many school boards and education systems employ in order to supposedly track the performance of both students and teachers. Although the overall purpose of these testing systems is heavily contested, the point Liam makes is that they are part of a larger movement in management doctrine to have metrics of performance and that is an apolitical management technique.

The idea of using performance metrics, and universities engaging in what Liam described as postmodern performativity, was brought up in Chapter 2 with the discussing of both Delucchi and Smith (1997) and Roberts (2007). Roberts (2007) in particular explored the implementation of performativity measurements in the case of New Zealand. Roberts concluded that the performativity reforms enacted in New Zealand, “cemented the notion that research is a competitive, self-interested, instrumental, outputs oriented process more deeply [rooted] in institutional consciousness than ever before” (p. 362). Thus, the idea that Liam brought up has definite links to the broader literature on the impact of neoliberalism and importing of business style managerial techniques. There seems to be a general agreement among the respondents that neoliberalism, or at the very

least, its effects, are so all encompassing that there is no ‘outside’ of this condition and the management of the university gives evidence of the idea of an all encompassing force at work. As Emma argues, “so, we are all living in a neoliberal society, even those of us who might want to opt out of it. There is no opting out of it. There is no outside of neoliberal society”.

In sum, from my analysis of the interview data, there are a few characteristics that were routinely brought up in the various definitions of neoliberalism they provided. Firstly, neoliberalism is an extension of the historical project of liberalism but with a heightened importance to the aspects of economic freedom. Secondly, while there are broad areas of policies that are part of the neoliberal agenda, there it is not a definitive test to determine what constitutes neoliberalism. Thirdly, it is this amorphous nature that is potentially the most important aspect of neoliberalism, as its effects are difficult to categorize exclusively but include managerial ideas that may not have been present in other eras.

The participants indicated the various ways that neoliberalism defies precise definition. Similarly, Fairclough (2002) explains that as neoliberalism, as a modern dilemma, creates a,

‘re-structuring’, in the sense that there are shifts in relations between different domains or fields of social life – most obviously, between the economic field and other fields (including the political, educational and artistic fields), including a ‘colonization’ of other fields by the economic field. (p. 163)

In short, neoliberalism takes over the entire spectrum of life and society and thus seeing it is sometimes difficult because it has become habituated. Or as Noah described it:

It's a bit like being in the fishbowl; you don't know that the water is around you. I think it influences all the decisions that we make as a faculty and it influences all of the decisions we don't make as a faculty or that we may not be allowed to make because that decision has been removed because it is being made at the administrative level. (May 4, 2015)

This analogy is particularly important as it directly plays into the premise of the critical discourse analysis performed on the recruitment websites. The water of neoliberalism interacts with everyone in our most intimate moments as when we try to think of policy options, our imaginations become limited by the very nature of the discourse that is available.

It is precisely this problem of a dominant discourse, such as neoliberalism, controlling the way that people think, that Ethan so forcefully argued. Ethan observed how neoliberalism makes society's view on complex social issues incredibly myopic by asking:

Do we have the ability to talk about larger systemic issues like pay inequality or rape culture? They escape our grasp. This is the danger and this happens as well in higher education. The ideology based in neoliberalism becomes so dominant that we can't grasp them. It's not like we have looked and studied and then rejected these ideas. It just becomes an out and out discounting that these phenomena could occur. (April 28, 2015)

Again, although dissenters, like Logan, could bring up the lack of specificity when using the term neoliberal as a weakness in the critique of neoliberalism as a phenomenon, it is

precisely this all-encompassing nature of neoliberalism that was most prominent in the responses by the respondents when they were trying to define it.

### **Higher Education and Neoliberalism**

One of the biggest strengths of having university professors participate in this study is that they help provide a perspective on the potential impacts of neoliberalism as they have experienced them in the functional day-to-day interactions of higher education. Unsurprisingly, this is where the preponderance of the interviews ended up spending the greatest time and where I saw the greatest opportunity to discover the impact of neoliberalism on their work. During these discussions, the two general areas that were addressed were how neoliberalism affects the role of the institutions of higher education, and how the role of students has been shaped by neoliberalism.

In Chapter 2, the literature on both the impact of neoliberalism on the institutions and on the students was explored. In the case of the institutions and focus of education, the ideas of human capital theory, private sector research, and Ritzer's (1998) concept of the McUniversity were all discussed. In each of these areas of discussion regarding the impact of neoliberalism on the institution of higher education, there was strong theoretical evidence linking neoliberalism to changes in the nature of university education. Similarly, in Chapter 2, the increasingly changing role of the students was noted in the literature. Brownlee (2005), Giroux (1999), Newson (2004), and Saunders (2010), amongst others, all pointed towards the development of student-consumers and this is fundamentally altered role for students than would have existed in other eras. The interviews helped give insight into the findings of the literature review.



**The university ideal.** In this first area of concern, there are some ways that the respondents saw such impact. Part of gauging the way in which neoliberalism has changed the university in terms of its mission is developing a broad understanding of what the role of universities ought to be. While it cannot be claimed that there was universal agreement among every respondent, there is a somewhat shared vision among many of the respondents. Olivia, for instance, presented a clear outline of this goal of the university by stating:

I think our core goal is to be a public institution: a space for the engagement of thought and social critique. I think that's what we should be about and I think our society would be better if we worked toward these aims at the institution. Rather than, for example, the sort of agenda we have around what kind of skills do we need to equip our students with to be competent in the 21st century. (May 14, 2015)

Within this vision, there are some main features that I would like to tease out. One of the most glaring characteristics is the notion of universities being a public institution that is aimed towards thought and critique of society at large. This suggests an engaged academy that is geared towards asking questions of both the private and political world. The engaged role of intellectuals and universities is juxtaposed with the negative definition within the response that is expressed as universities being an institution focused on skills acquisition for private employment. Suspitsyna (2012) suggests that it is this privatized idea of education being an economic good that is gaining ascendancy in the contemporary discourse on higher education. Yet, it is the idea of a university serving a public and civic good that is shared by many of the respondents. Even though most also

acknowledged at some level that education should at least help secure employment even if that is not the primary goal of the institution.

A key concept that almost every respondent thought was in jeopardy as a result of neoliberalism within higher education is the ability of the university to help students and society as a whole to think critically. Emma made the distinction between schooling and education to address how neoliberalism can fundamentally alter the purpose of the university. She described it in the following manner:

Schooling has to do with the buildings in which we go and the system, which pushes kids through, particularly, paced systems of time and timelines and grades and subject matter and subject disciplines. Whereas education is about these other kinds of things that I'm talking about, giving students the capacity to think critically about the world they live in. Giving students the capacity to understand how things work, why they work that way, whose interests they serve and what they need to do to change it if they think it doesn't serve their interests. (May 12, 2015)

Emma's distinction between schooling and education mirrors much of what other respondents believed to be at stake with regard to the influence of neoliberalism on the core mission of universities. In gross terms, the argument from the respondents was that universities are increasingly pushed towards a model of schooling rather than education by the pressure of neoliberalism.

There was also the theme of education as a political act. For example, Olivia argued that:

I think it is important for us to understand that education is a political act, to understand that what we do as professors is a political act. That we make choices and we ought to recognize that and that we are hugely influential. We can choose for that influence to be in particular ways. I think it's important to recognize it as a political act. (May 14, 2015)

Olivia is clearly not an advocate for political indoctrination through education but for equipping students to be political actors in their societies. However, she is drawing attention to the idea that no matter the intent of an educator, a school, or the educational system, the choices that govern the content and method of instruction ultimately are political.

Similarly, Liam specifically addresses the political nature of a university education but makes the distinction between an overtly political education and an education that is political by its very nature. Liam states:

We [faculty members in education] don't get the students who want to lock themselves in a library to do equations and read tomes. There is already a push for my research to make a difference in the world or this kind of thing. In that context, I try to push students to think about research as building understandings rather than on fixing things, or saving the world. I try to privilege analysis over prescription and I think that's important. I think that people should be motivated for bigger purposes or there are ways in which knowledge can inform changing the world but I don't see the act of academic work to be political in that way. I see it as a kind of thinking, a kind of analysis, trying to illuminate dynamics or processes. If I had a student researching neoliberalism I would really press for

conceptual understanding. If there were critiques involved, it would be really open up dynamics and layers of understanding and layers of neoliberalism and their effects rather than just spewing an anti-neoliberal kind of diatribe. (May 7, 2015)

Liam tended to be one of the most sceptical respondents on the question of neoliberalism, in the sense that he tended to ascribe the cause of some of the changes in universities to other factors than the prevalence and strength of neoliberalism. This scepticism was similar to that expressed by Logan. Their key arguments were the problem of too many changes not directly attributable to neoliberalism being ascribed to neoliberalism. In this case, Liam's response points to the wider context in which universities exist and have been discussed in Chapter 2. But even within this response, there is a concordance with the arguments made by many of the respondents. Liam is saying that a university education should be about probing society and reality. By focusing on analysis rather than prescriptions, the academy begins the conversation and helps delineate the contours of the discussion. While some professors would also push for an emphasis on activism, the very act of interrogating the world through analysis is a form of activism despite Liam's reticence to characterize it as such.

**Students.** The respondents provided a great deal of insight during the conversations on the effects of neoliberalism on students and their relationship to education, their professors, and the perceived expectations they had about life once they graduated. The common refrain from most of the respondents was that they see that the fundamental relationships between professor and the student have changed. Instead of an

apprenticeship model that casts the professor as a knowledgeable expert, they are now service providers and the student is a client.

Olivia provided the most direct explanation of this change from student to client in the following manner:

I think parents are told they are clients. So they act accordingly. I think they are playing their role as they are supposed to in that regard. I don't hear the demand from students. I hear that they are cast that way. Those are some of things we are dealing with when we talk about the [neoliberal] discourse and how it distracts us.

(May 14, 2015)

While Olivia does not necessarily believe that every student subscribes to a client-based model, it is certainly a powerful influence on how many students perceive themselves in relation to their education. In the case of Noah's fishbowl analogy, a fish could exist in water and not necessarily recognize it is wet just as forces that are not evident to their own perceptions can affect a student.

It is not only Olivia who sees this dynamic at play. Emma and Ethan ascribe a view of education on the part of the students that casts them as consumers of a service. The service they purchase is a discrete and strategic set of qualifications that will allow their personal and private life to succeed by eventually gaining lucrative employment by virtue of their diploma. Ethan puts this dynamic in the following terms, "a lot of people view a higher education as, you do this, you do this, you do this and you know to secure grades or to get to the next step in your career" (April 28, 2015). This view of a university education is thoroughly instrumentalized and removes any notion of deep learning. It is reduced to a mere checklist to be filled out rather than an open-ended

process of continual growth. The critique of change in relationship between the students and professors as a result of neoliberalism was dealt with in depth in Chapter 2. The concept of the student-consumer seemingly has an impact as demonstrated by these responses from the participants. Emma, carried such a critique for neoliberal education further stating that:

I think a lot of students who come out of higher education and, out of undergraduate programs, may be good at some of the skills they have learned, but I think way too few of them achieve an understanding of how the world works and how they would like to see it work and what they need to do about it. Way too few of them come out with a critical framework they need to understand about how hegemony works. This hyper individualization, this neoliberal framework, they have has no concept of how these things work or at least not many do. (May 12, 2015)

The influence of neoliberalism on how students view their education is, therefore, profound, as it changes the very concept of education to a purely individual economic exercise. Of course, universities have always given their graduates a competitive edge in the job market through the commercial value of credentials. However, what these three respondents argued was that neoliberalism has now made the primary goal of education that of economic aggrandizement for the individual. This type of education is strictly focused on the definable outcomes of a university degree and can be described as a general focus on the accumulation of credentials.

## **Credentialism**

The term “credentialism” encapsulates this strict focus of education and it emerged as a central theme of the interviews. Essentially, credentialism is the idea that employers will see educational credentials as a form of currency for employers (Walters, 2004). Thus, for students, there is a pressure to attain a degree in order to find future employment. Emma, for instance, explained the idea succinctly in the following manner:

Jobs that previously could be learned “on the job” now require a credential first and then learning on the job. So, there is a whole range of things along with this idea that education is a private value rather a public good. (May 12, 2015)

Within this response are the two aspects of how education is fundamentally changed, particularly higher education, by a search for credentials. Firstly, there is the outside force exerted on the individual student who may feel pressured into studying in a field for purely strategic reasons of economy and career. The student feels intense pressure to make sure that their undergraduate or graduate choice is directly tied to the pursuit of not only a general career but also a particular occupation. Emma went so far as to say that she believes this pressure caused “mental stress” for students.

The second aspect is the potential reversal of onus on both society and the private world regarding education. When Emma explains how “there is a whole range of things along with this idea that education is a private rather than a public good,” part of this ‘range of things’ involves the private sector washing its hands of developing its workforce internally. Instead, the individual is expected to have such training done with their own funds both before they begin their careers and concurrently to either remain employed or to be promoted. Moreover, such a focus on the private responsibility for

education individualizes, in a similar manner to the way that Bauman and Donskis (2016) argued, the benefits of education. Instead of a university degree being seen as a boon for society in which the individual participates, it is transformed into a strategic document that makes the individual competitive in the job market. Even though most universities are publicly funded, such individualism shapes higher learning from being a public good to a solely private market enterprise.

Emma pointed out such a self-defeating dynamic of credentialism when she discussed the ever-increasing requirements for school administrators. Drawing upon her career as an education professor, Emma explained the evolution of requirements to become a principal in the following manner:

So, when I started, you had to have taken your B.Ed., of course, and had to have taken a number of principal courses and I'm not even sure if you had to have started your Masters then. But as time went on, you had to take Principal Course 1, Principal Course 2 and now you have to have a Master's degree. So you can see what it now takes to advance to principal and not a very long time and not very many years really, the sort of growth of credentialing of what it means to be a principal. That's certainly the case that universities participate in this inflation of credentialism. (May 12, 2015)

The inflation of credentials is the obvious outcome of what I would call an educational arms race that continues to play out. Many of the respondents believe their students seemed to believe in the bare necessity of at least an undergraduate degree for future employment. For instance, as I mentioned above, Liam discussed how, in his work as a professor of education, he does not see his students wanting to, as he said “lock



themselves in a library and read tomes”. Similarly, Ethan spoke about how he sees a simple input output relationship in universities where students are looking only for the credit to bolster their future employability.

Likewise, Noah discussed how he observed, both as a student and as a professor, that some students viewed education as a series of hoops that needed to be jumped through in order to achieve an end. The “hoop” metaphor is apt here, meaning that education has become, from what my respondents indicated, a series of hoops through which students need to be jump. Noah explained this metaphor in the following manner,

I think the hoop jumping is really apt. I hear that kind of thing not only from teacher candidates that I work with, but I heard that from when I was going into schools following teacher candidates in placements. You'd hear that from associate teachers who are actually supposed to be mentoring the teacher candidates: "This really isn't about education it's a thing you have to do." (May 4, 2015)

Such a hoop-focused point of view is at least partially the result of the viewing of education in terms of credentials. Perhaps it is the case that there has always been a view of education as merely a means to an end; however, having universities reinforce this view changes the nature of the relationship between students and the institution. In essence, the role of the student becomes a consumerist enterprise based on the product that the student receives rather than a non-commercial activity that shapes minds and fosters civic engagement.

In this version of universities, students are now cast in the role of clients or consumers, and they expect a certain level of customer satisfaction much in the same way

as any other consumer experience. There is a benefit to this different relationship between the student and the institution as highlighted by Olivia. She made the point that meeting the needs of students can be good pedagogy. However, she also stated that it was not because of sound pedagogy that students' needs were catered to; instead, it is due to pressures that university administrators feel to differentiate their university in competition with other universities. Thus, it is a crass attempt to bolster enrolment numbers.

Olivia also made the point that, particularly with the advent of online courses and the growing view of education as simply a ticket to future employment, some students increasingly expect professors to act like customer care specialists. For instance, Olivia stated:

Due to a program that is completely done online, we have students who demand that you respond to emails immediately, that they get something for this and they don't like to be challenged. They don't want to be pushed. They want, in the words of one student, "I don't want to do any thinking on this, I just want you to tell me what I need to do." (May 14, 2015)

It seems incredible that some students would take such a position, but even more so as this student was reportedly in a graduate level course. Olivia held the view that potentially many in the academy do, that the purpose of higher education, particularly at the graduate level, is to be able to engage in self-directed study and inquiry. The expectation that a professor will provide students not only with the challenge, but also with the solution and a way to implement it, seems antithetical to this kind of education and almost absurd for most graduate students. However, this example shows that the

traditional role of a university education and the expectations of students are certainly in flux.

It is evident that for many of these professors, the effect of neoliberalism on their practice as educators and scholars has wide-ranging effects. Neoliberalism works in the macro and micro aspects of their practice. From the directives as assigned by the management of a university to the individual goals of students in a course or program, the clear conclusion of these interviews is a consistent demonstration of the effects of neoliberalism. Moreover, the professors throughout the interviews did not limit their ideas to their work as academics only. The macro level analysis provided by the respondents stretched into the world outside of the university itself.

### **Intellectual Life in Society at Large**

The specific choice of recruiting professors whose speciality involves looking at the larger contextual issues can also provide another vantage point to understand how neoliberalism might affect society at large. Each of these respondents has unique views on how society might be influenced by neoliberalism and, unsurprisingly, one area of concern for these professors is the notion of the public intellectual in a neoliberal era. Most of the discussions of being a public intellectual were self-reflections on how the respondents sees themselves and their work.

For Sophia, for example, the role of professor includes a large moral responsibility to serve not only their students or research goals, but to also interact with the public at large. Sophia describes this moral responsibility as follows:

Well I guess I identify as an educator and also as a researcher and also see myself as having a moral responsibility as a public scholar. So there is a service

component, making contributions to society more broadly and also in different capacities. I meet with students in different capacities through research and as a researcher as a public scholar in service capacities. Beyond that, the third piece for me draws on my teaching and research, the concerns I have about the other life on the planet as well as social justice issues and wanting to make a contribution to more just conditions on the planet. (March 31, 2015)

Thus, in Sophia's view, there is a responsibility to society at large to use the skills and knowledge developed in her role of being a professor to help inform and ultimately impact the decisions of the society at large.

In much the same way, Mason sees a large amount of responsibility towards society at large, particularly when a professor has become tenured. Mason's comments on public intellectuals refers to the culture of performativity as discussed earlier by arguing that:

I think that maybe when you get tenured you can relax a little bit. And people ask me why I expend all this energy because I don't have to do all this work anymore. But I feel as though there is a responsibility in a way because I resent my tenured colleagues who think they can just sit there because there is no accountability. So once again there is a push pull. I believe in accountability. There are a number of scholars I don't respect or see as public intellectuals. I think they are milking the system. (June 8, 2015)

Sophia and Mason both point out how a professor's role, as they see it, should include a broader responsibility outside of a narrow definition of teaching at the university level. In the case of Mason, he sees the problem, somewhat ironically, that even in an era of

increased accountability there is a tendency for some of his tenured colleagues to disengage as there is not the incentive to produce once they have job security. Sophia, in a similar way but with a different focus, speaks of how she sees her role as a professor to include serving society and engaging with contemporary political and social problems.

These responses fit into the idea of neoliberalism curtailing and narrowing the roles of individuals in society to merely serving an economic or consumer based lifestyle. Barber (2001) speaks of how consumerism attacks the notion of the common good and the concept of a greater purpose for an individual (p.117). Mason and Sophia help articulate how academics think about their role in society at large and their responsibility to engage with the public. It is a similar concept to Marginson's (2009) discussion of how neoliberalism does not take away all agency from academics but, instead, it limits and channels choices (p. 87). These ideals can be lost in a neoliberal academy.

### **Atomization**

In the preceding discussion of the effect of neoliberalism on the notion of the public intellectual, the sense of atomization of the individual became evident. This idea of how neoliberalism seems to atomize society was commented on by a plurality of respondents. Certainly, the concept of the individual as the supreme unit in society is something that can be said, is part of the neoliberal project as it is an extension of the classical liberal concepts of the importance of the individual. However, now the individual is mainly a consumer rather than a citizen. It is this distinction that many of the respondents discussed.

One of the more in-depth explanations of the process of atomization was given by Mason who argued that:

The whole idea of the neoliberal subject is how we are now all required to take responsibility for ourselves. There is this illusion that we are free to make choices, but those choices are always defined in terms of a dominant discourse of neoliberalism, in the sense that the market, when you think about every aspect of our lives, is reduced to consumption on so many levels. (June 8, 2015)

There are many ideas contained in this response. Firstly, the concept of individuality is generally seen as positive because the individual and their rights have been a key characteristic of democracies. Yet, the concept of the individual that is referenced by Mason is not a broad based concept of an individual's rights before the law, but a narrow consumer's existence. The type of choice being offered in this version of individualism is between competing brands in the market place.

However, many of the respondents were in agreement that students are so overwhelmed by the neoliberal version of choice; they simply consider it to be the only option available. For instance, Olivia spoke of the surprise and shock that some of her students exhibit when their assumptions are challenged, noting that:

So, for example they talk a lot about the primacy of choice, being able to have our freedoms as individuals. I try to teach them about this dominant way of thinking. And that it doesn't align with the sort of social justice way of thinking. They find that quite shocking and I think also enlightening. (May 14, 2015)

Arguing against choice seems somehow heretical even anti-democratic, but the type of existence that Olivia challenges is not particularly democratic, either. What is lacking from the atomized existence that these various respondents ascribed to neoliberalism is the notion of being a member of society, rather than only an individual.

The difference between these two concepts revolves around the somewhat difficult to define idea of citizenship and being a citizen of a democratic and open society. Many respondents referred to the concept of citizenship in a tangential manner, and the term citizen was used often. Emma, in particular, provided the most applicable discussion of what the idea of citizenship means and how it plays into the discussion of neoliberalism in the following way:

Currently, what has happened is that the notion of citizen has been pushed and pushed and pushed to the point where neoliberal political and economic bodies have attempted, with quite a bit of success, to have ideologically convinced individuals that they are not responsible for themselves as a community but are responsible for themselves individually. (May 12, 2015)

It is this elevation of individuality and the atomization of the person that makes neoliberalism a critical force in society even if it goes largely unnoticed by the general public. What Emma brings up is a concept of the individual that is devoid of responsibilities and only emphasizes rights. Ultimately, the central right that neoliberalism is concerned with is the right of students to operate as a consumer of goods.

This neoliberal sense of the self is of particular importance in the context of a democratic society and is at the crux of Emma's critique of the impact of neoliberalism. The neoliberal version of citizenship, according to Emma, reduces the idea of the citizen to merely a taxpayer. Emma argues that contrary to the language surrounding the taxpayer, members of society should instead look at ourselves as citizens. Emma makes the distinction in the following manner:

We aren't taxpayers; we are citizens and as a taxpayer, I want certain kinds of returns. As a citizen, I have very particular responsibilities and concerns. So it is the difference between feelings that I have a responsibility to the society in which I live and I have rights and privileges that don't carry any kind of responsibility. That's the difference for me, the difference between what I think a citizen is, someone who is responsible for the society that they live in, and neoliberalism which is pushing us to think only of what we can buy. (May 12, 2015)

The distinction between what Emma considers citizenship and the much narrower concept of the taxpayer is critical when thinking about the health of a democratic state. If citizens of such a society buy into a narrower conceptualization of the responsibilities and rights, there is at least some doubt as to how such a society would not ultimately slip into a comfortable tyranny.

This reduced version of citizenship is certainly the fear for Emma and ultimately is the reason why neoliberalism and its influence are considered to be so potentially dangerous. Emma is leery of the complacent attitude demonstrated by some of the language surrounding participation in Canadian society. Emma vehemently argues that:

The problem with our democracy is that I actually think the most successful dictatorship is a system that is called a democracy but people are denied the knowledge, information, and education to actually understand the issues in such a way that they can actually vote for or against out of a place where they understand the issues. (May 12, 2015)

While this statement is certainly bold, there is a consistent logic that leads Emma to make such an extreme argument. By reducing the notion of citizenship to purely market-based



terms, the responsibility of the individual is reduced to purely market-related concerns. This essentially means the reduction of all considerations down to an individualized concern over taxation and other purely financial issues. It does not necessarily hold a citizen to account in terms of being engaged with other matters and it continues this drive toward extreme individualism. The potential impact of this with regard to education is that the university becomes just another transactional relationship where the student purchases the outcome they need or want.

The atomization of the role of the individual in society and the reduction of citizenship to that of a consumer is borne out in much of the literature on neoliberalism. For instance, Barber (1998) discusses how market logic precludes thinking of society as a whole and working as a group. Instead, markets privilege aggregate individual choices within the marketplace. Similarly, Bauman and Donskis (2016) discuss at length how the concept of the individual as a consumer attacks the notion of community. The consumer mode of living atomizes society into discreet decisions based on market choices. This is a potentially problematic aspect of neoliberalism as found in the literature but echoed in the interviews.

### **Resistance**

The question of resistance was directly asked in the guiding questions. Therefore, it is no surprise that the idea of resistance became a theme within the responses. For most of the respondents who discussed neoliberalism and how it shapes their practice as educators and researchers, the key problem is that it is not an easily resisted concept. It works, as was said earlier, in covert ways rather than as an obvious full frontal assault on the academy. Many of the effects outlined through these interviews can almost seem

benign or so incremental that to stand on principle against them would seem like an overreaction, or at the very least, irrational. Besides, many faculty members and perhaps also students feel vulnerable to unemployment or losing security in their professional careers. Emma highlighted this by saying that neoliberalism succeeds precisely by pushing people into extreme vulnerability and that, “by taking people to such limits of what I would call non-viability or what I would call economic stress that, for example, people won't act for fear of losing what little they have.” Thus, the framework that most professors and students are locked into inhibits potential resistance.

Throughout the entire interview process, Liam provided a great number of interesting reflections because, in many ways, Liam was rather sceptical of the effects of neoliberalism. This sort of insight allowed for Liam to provide a great deal of context from within academia, and on this point of resistance Liam provided an excellent explanation of the conflicting nature of finding ways, or even motivation, to resist neoliberal policies, let alone a unifying spirit, within faculties. In a long response, Liam stated:

Apart from the things that are obvious like schools going and looking for more money, there are less obvious things involved like having a graduate student ask for supervision but you already have far too many students as it is. If I say no, I don't really see that as a productive resistance. It's not like your everyday actions necessarily line up in a way such that you can resist this because you're right inside. Some of your own interests reside in this. Sometimes, I bring work intensification onto myself too, because of my goals or whatever. It's tricky. Some of us [faculty] can barely stand each other. Or, we have different theoretical

perspectives. Or, someone's wronged someone else. It's not like we're some kind of cohesive group you could actually rally effectively. So if administration says: what do you want as a faculty? Well, apart from some broad-brush strokes, we can't tell them because we don't agree ourselves. So, there are layers of conflict and power relations within as well as across the groups and the levels. (May 7, 2015)

The fractured nature of faculties is a definite challenge to organizing resistance. Firstly, there must be general agreement that there are policies and directives that are inhibiting the key goals of the university and that these are as a result of neoliberalism. Secondly, the choices of forms of resistance are complicated by the core goals of education.

Namely, if I stop taking on extra tasks or supervision duties, does that stop neoliberalism or only hurt my career or my students? Moreover, there is no secret that within faculties there can be huge rivalries between professors based on personal animosity or professional jealousies. The practical matter of organizing such a fractured group is somewhat daunting.

Perhaps the most important first step is to identify the ideology at work and some of the implications of neoliberalism as it works. For Noah, there is the difficult admission that even with a will to resist, the actual manner in which he resists is difficult to illustrate. The approach that Noah takes that most directly opposes neoliberalism is the way in which he goes about working with education student teachers. Noah stated it this way:

So, I guess I would say with my work with students, in terms of training teachers, central to the neoliberal ideology are these ideas of power and control and the way

that people are allowed to wield power and control in their lives as agents.

Teachers, I think often unconsciously wield a lot of power and control. So, school systems put teachers in positions of authority over students and whether or not they are conscious of it or not they, are wielding that authority. So, I would say the things that I try to do most consciously is try to help teacher candidates understand that in education they will hold power and control over people and they have a lot of choice over how they wield that control. (May 4, 2015)

Such a method of resistance is by no means a dramatic gesture, but it is certainly within the realm of possibilities for faculty members. Particularly because this study focused on professors in various education programs, the first and most profound act of resistance must surely be in the very way teachers are educated. The education of teachers in turn, has an effect on the way students in elementary and high schools are educated and slowly changes the face of education for at least some.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown various themes throughout the responses. These themes were clearly focused by the guiding questions but there were also themes and responses that were not anticipated. The themes encountered involved the general effects of neoliberalism on education, the changing or altered role of students in universities, the perceived instrumentalized attitude towards education, the reduced role for intellectuals and the atomization of existence in a neoliberal reality. The various conceptualizations of neoliberalism demonstrated that each individual, despite the formal definitions that the respondents demonstrated a firm knowledge of in their responses, had personal connection to its functioning in their work as professors and for some, their lives as

citizens. These definitions bled over to their assessments of the impact on higher education. Their experiences with students were also affected, in varying degrees, by neoliberalism and an unexpected impact was the concept of credentialism. In various ways, the respondents argued that students they have encountered seem to view their university education, as Noah described it, as just another hoop to jump through on their way to a career. The view of the impact of neoliberalism on society at large was somewhat varied with some respondents like Emma being very concerned and other respondents like Mason being not as disturbed because they see this as a long-term reality of society. From the results of these interviews, the majority of the respondents believed that neoliberalism is certainly a powerful factor in their work as professors.

In the next chapter, I combine the results from both the website analysis and the interviews. The chapter contextualizes the power of neoliberal philosophy on society and its importance to education as demonstrated through this study. I also suggest where this research might lead to in further studies and projects.

## **Chapter 6: Blue and Red Ink**

This study was designed to answer one primary research question and two subsequent questions. The primary research question is, “In what ways does neoliberalism influence Canadian universities?” The first sub-question is, “How and in what ways do universities include neoliberal discourse in their recruitment websites?” The second sub-question is, “In what might professors see the effects of neoliberalism in their daily activities as educators, researchers, and members of the university community?” In order to review the results and answer these three questions, I restate the context for the study by highlighting a useful metaphor, followed by an example.

### **Restating the Context**

In 2001, Thomas Mulcair was a member of the National Assembly of Quebec and a member of the Liberal Party of Québec. Mulcair would eventually become the leader of the national New Democratic Party of Canada that, historically, has occupied the left of Canadian politics. In this statement, Mulcair discussed the limits of government and his belief in the efficiency of the market. Mulcair argued,

In Quebec, the government is so omnipresent and plays in so many sandboxes at the same time that we can no longer speak of a free market ... A government should never have the pretension of being able to replace the free market. It does not work. It didn't work in England. Up until the time of Margaret Thatcher, that is what they tried, the government had its nose in everything. (quoted in Lévesque, 2016)

In this statement Mulcair voiced a belief that many held in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. The conviction that Mulcair expressed was that with the collapse of the Soviet

Union, there were no true alternatives to the supremacy of the markets. In a sense, history had spoken and ruled in favour of capitalism. Fukuyama provided an intellectual and theoretical framework for this view in his *End of History* (1992) thesis. Fukuyama seemingly explained the dissolution of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the apparent victory of the United States in the Cold War as the conclusion of a long-term historical dialectic with democratic capitalism the victor.

In a rejoinder to this previous work, Fukuyama (1995) summed up his belief that liberal, market-based regimes are the end product of a long dialectical process by stating that:

for a variety of theoretical reasons, liberal democracy and free markets constitute the best regime, or more precisely the best of the available alternative ways of organizing human societies (or again, if one prefers Churchill's formulation, the least bad way of doing so). It most fully (though not completely) satisfies the most basic human longings, and therefore can be expected to be more universal and more durable than other regimes or other principles of political organization. (1995, p. 30)

In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, Fukuyama seemingly predicted the historical necessity of capitalist democracies dominating the world. Market logic had proven to be an effective way of organizing an economy and society as a whole. The previously discussed proponents of capitalism and their students including Von Mises, Hayek, and Friedman could point to the collapse of the Soviet Union as a fulfillment of their beliefs in the liberating power of free market values and the natural efficiency of markets.

Despite the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, where history apparently awoke, the march of capitalism largely went unchecked. Despite the massive increase in surveillance, the launching of the War on Terrorism, and the general panic induced by these horrifying attacks, the basic formula of market liberalism was unaffected. Even states like China, which is nominally communist, accelerated the inclusion of markets into the economy, despite the political landscape and freedoms remaining virtually unchanged since the days of Mao Zedong. The expansion of free expression and individual rights that were sold as part of the benefits of capitalism in Fukuyama's thesis have largely eluded the growth and spread of market ideology in many states, most notably China. Market reforms promised that eventually, freedom would follow. It seems as if markets can function just as well in repressive regimes as in nominally free states. In fact, some may argue that capitalism functions even better in these repressive countries. The moral argument for capitalism providing political freedom was not validated in these nations. Political freedoms are not necessary as long as consumer choices are available to the average citizen.

Žižek (2002) claims this state of affairs is not an aberration but the proper functioning of ideology. Žižek, who often employs lewd and comical metaphors to describes the functioning of ideology by recalling a joke from the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). In this joke, Žižek tells how there are two workers in the GDR, one of whom is about to leave for Siberia to start a new job. The two workers set up a code system, in case their letters are intercepted and read, wherein anything that is true will be written in blue ink, and anything that is false are written in red ink. Eventually, the worker who stayed in the GDR receives a letter from his friend written in



blue ink that says, “everything is wonderful here: the shops are full, food is abundant, apartments are large and properly heated, cinemas show films from the West, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair – the only thing you can’t get is red ink” (p. 1). The point of the story, according to Žižek, is that it shows the functioning of ideology. Ideological power works through curtailing the types of conversations that are had and the conclusions that are reached. As Žižek argues, “one starts by agreeing that one has all the freedoms one wants – then one merely adds that the only thing missing is the ‘red ink’: we ‘feel free’ because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom” (2002, p. 02).

In essence, this study attempts to provide a method of finding and using metaphorical red ink. It is this larger context, where the former leader of one of Canada’s most influential and most left-leaning political parties can speak favourably of Margaret Thatcher’s market-reforms in England that this study takes place. Regardless of Thomas Mulcair’s current opinions on the role of markets in society, his address to the Quebec National Assembly speaks to a consensus in many parts of society that believes that markets ought to be left to run on their own.

The joke that Žižek tells helps the conceptual understanding of neoliberalism that was discussed in Chapter 2, but restated here in a colourful manner. Žižek’s analogy of the difficulty in communicating the effect of an ideology that is so pervasive that it does not provide the individual a method of communicating its effects is useful to this study. The results demonstrate an ingrained way of looking at not only education but also, the world in general. Consumerism, marketization, globalization are all part of neoliberalism and they necessarily work in overt ways.

## **The Study**

I carried out this research to answer one fundamental question and two subsequent questions relating to neoliberalism and higher education. The primary question that was asked was, “In what ways does neoliberalism influence Canadian universities?” From this overarching question, the study sought to answer, “How and in what ways do universities include neoliberal discourse in their recruitment websites?” I also explored, “In what ways might professors see the effects of neoliberalism in their daily activities as educators, researchers, and members of the university community?”

To answer these questions, two different but related methodologies were used. In the portion of the study that dealt with the website analysis, CDA was used, specifically Fairclough’s (1993) three-dimensional analysis model. In the website analysis, fourteen universities were examined. In the interview portion of the study, an ethnographic approach was used. The choice of reinforcing the study with an ethnographic examination follows the arguments of both Fairclough (2003) and Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000), that CDA should be situated within an ethnographic framework. In the interview portion of this study, eight professors participated providing their personal reflections, experiences, and ideas regarding the significance of neoliberalism to their work as academics. The results of both sections of research were discussed and presented using a thematic approach as proposed by Ayres (2008) and Ely et al. (2006).

My overall analysis indicates that language and practice of neoliberalism has had an effect on higher education as demonstrated by the interviews and the website analysis. In both these lines of inquiry, there was strong evidence that neoliberalism is a factor in

the way that higher education is being marketed to potentially students and as a factor in how professors carry out their work in the academy.

**Connecting the two approaches.** The university websites that I considered to be highly affected by neoliberal themes, language, and ideas represented the largest group of universities. They included York University, the University of Waterloo, Simon Fraser University, the University of Regina, the University of Victoria, Concordia University, and the University of Windsor. Out of a group of 14, half of the universities showed a high degree of neoliberal infiltration in their websites. Along with this analysis, the interviews provided reinforcing ideas that helped contextualize what was being communicated on the websites. The research produced vital thematic agreements between the two methods of inquiry. These include a heavy reliance on consumer messaging that seemingly is meant to connect to a consumer-driven society. Similar to this idea is the understanding of the stealthy nature neoliberal change in education including the messaging and finally, the concept of understanding neoliberalism as an active enterprise. These findings will be discussed below and help substantiate much of the literature that was discussed previously in Chapter 2.

***Consumer messaging for a consumer culture.*** In the study, various universities demonstrated a consumer message around their education. For instance, the University of Waterloo was the most overt in their use of neoliberal terms and arguments for their school. To this end, the University of Waterloo's homepage is seemingly developed to project their brand. This is evident in the colour coordinated design elements, the sleekness of the interface and the often-found promotional news stories about the institution, their professors, or their students. This website seemingly adopts the tropes

that any branded website would use for customer relations. For some, it would seem reasonable that a university should take care of their public persona. In the era of the Internet, an institutional web presence is surely a large part of this outreach. However, it is not entirely necessary to gear a university website towards people outside of the faculty and students as shown by the slightly affected group. The slightly affected group demonstrates that not all universities have to project a branded appearance to the outside world. In this group, websites were very much oriented toward the needs of current students and faculty. They were seemingly designed for the purpose of servicing current students. A possible explanation of this need for universities to use such strong marketing campaigns is the need for funds as a result of the previously discussed the declining level of government funding provided through federal transfer funds (Brownlee, 2016). The lost of outside sources of funds could pressure universities into using the language of advertising to recruit students. The self-promotional stories that were found in the highly affected category might see these as ways of lobbying the outside world for further support and expansion in an era of government austerity.

The highly affected universities consistently positioned themselves to the outside world in neoliberal terms. Waterloo is an excellent example of this positioning both in distinct ways and in hidden ways. The focus of the website can be seen as both an obvious and an inconspicuous example as it uses words like innovation and entrepreneurship to describe the education the University of Waterloo provides. For instance, the University of Waterloo states that, “From high-level cryptography that keeps your information secure, to the safety and sustainability of the water we drink, Waterloo continues to shape the world we share” (University of Waterloo, n.d.). In this

clear but subtle way, the University of Waterloo sees the education it provides in almost solely market-based terms because the fruits of their labour are all commoditised products. The University of Waterloo, and other institution like it, are not arguing about the development of the person or the society, but the products that they and their graduates can innovate and invent. Despite the inclusion of the example of providing safe and sustainable drinking water, a potentially public good though not necessarily in the case of privately operated water utilities, the overall impact of a website like Waterloo's is that of privately focused education rather than public good. There is not much said in the text of a website like Waterloo about the importance of social activists, philosophers and politically engaged citizens.

The University of Waterloo is representative of this group of highly affected institutions because it is completely upfront with a view of academics that is focused on the world as a marketplace and a world that is positively influenced by the work of entrepreneurs and business people. This is not to say that in the classrooms and lecture halls a different narrative might be played out, but it is evident that what is being marketed to the outside world is part of what can be described as a neoliberal narrative. If there is a discrepancy between the messaging of the university and the practice of education going on at the universities, there are a few possible explanations to this disconnect. One possible explanation is that universities like the University of Waterloo are simply using the language of neoliberalism to communicate with a society dominated by neoliberal ideology. In short, the universities might be trying to use the language of a consumer society in order to communicate to a consumer student. This is similar to what

Ritzer (1998) predicted when discussing the McDonaldization of higher education or Baudrillard's (2005) ideas about the importance of advertising in a consumer society.

Baudrillard suggests that an institution within a consumer society is required to advertise as if promoting a consumer product for it to be understood. Baudrillard would argue that it is to be expected that universities would market themselves as a product because that is the way to be intelligible to a consumer society. Baudrillard's argument also concludes that meaning is made through advertising. In short, if Baudrillard is correct, a university that sells education as a commodity in its advertising is defining education as a consumer product and this has the potential to fundamentally alter the idea of the university in society. This study has shown a variety of ways that education is being marketed and how a large proportion of the universities examined use subtle and overt arguments of education being a commodity and education being valuable as a marketable good.

***Shadow messaging.*** One area of consistent agreement between the website analysis portion of this dissertation and the interview portion is the idea that neoliberalism is best understood not as an ideology that plays out in the light of day, but in the shadows. This is the concept that was mentioned by Emma when she discussed the tiny textured moments of everyday life. This is an aspect of neoliberalism that critical theorists such as Bauman and Donskis (2016), Fairclough (2000), and Žižek (2002) see as key to understanding how neoliberalism specifically, and ideology as a whole, works. Fairclough discusses how neoliberalism can and does deploy the symbolic resources of discourse in order to control the choices made by states and societies. The symbolic resources deployed by neoliberalism involve the use of specific language and terms that

shape the outcome of debate before it has even occurred. In essence, it is the capacity of neoliberalism to impart ideals and values without having to explicitly state these values.

For instance, terms such as flexibility of labour, transparency, competition, globalized, growth and free trade while potentially seemingly benign, act in implicitly ideological ways (Fairclough, 2000). Fairclough argues that these kinds of terms are not neutral in their use because they represent a certain way of ordering the world. It is difficult, for instance, to argue against growth because it is generally seen as a good thing. But when growth is the primary objective of a university or a college, what does that mean for the academic rigour of an institution, or for providing adequate resources to the students once they begin their studies? Fairclough's view that neoliberalism is an "incomplete project rather than a *fait accompli*" and that in order to win, various discursive and symbolic methods are unleashed to "pursue the project and extend the new order" (Fairclough, 2000, p. 148). In order to see neoliberal ideology at work, it must be found in symbolic and discursive choices that may not be completely obvious.

The most evident subtle infiltration of neoliberal ideas into the websites involved the ever-present real world idea found in many of the websites examined. At the core of this discourse is the notion that the world of the university is somehow separate from the world outside of the university. There are some antecedents to this notion of keeping the outside world out of the university. Hence, the idea of having a large campus that acts like a small, self-enclosed community that has a clear line of delineation. This idea of a cloistered environment has historical roots in the idea of the university as discussed in Chapter 2. In these historical examples as explained by both Bok (2015) and Deblanco (2003), the removal of the student from the wider society was seen as a goal of many

universities. However, the real world arguments found on many websites show the exact opposite idea at work, which is that a student experience is not valid until it is brought outside of the university and that the goal should be to get out of the academic environment relatively quickly.

The University of Victoria serves as a particularly good example of the subtlety of this argument. The website states that one of the key characteristics of its offering to students is that, “Classroom learning is just one piece of the puzzle—at UVic our students are challenged to learn in new and dynamic ways” (University of Victoria, n.d.). This statement by the University of Victoria embraces a dynamic of questioning the value of a traditional classroom or lecture hall university education and a shift towards a more experiential education. On its own, this statement is relatively unremarkable. It is reasonable to want an education that has other facets than just lectures and is responsive to technological and social changes. However, this statement exists within a website that consistently references the importance of getting out of the classroom and valuing the practical and specifically the career based over the theoretical. The argument that for a university education to be relevant and worthwhile, it must be strictly practical and useful to some definition of utility that is routinely linked partially if not wholeheartedly to employment is found throughout many university websites.

In comparison to terms of derision like “ivory tower” or “egghead,” the argument of a real world education potentially acts in a similar way. The argument that a student should get real world experiences as a foundation for their education might fit into a larger narrative that is suspicious of intellectuals and the theoretical aspects of almost any education. This narrative was discussed by Giroux (1999) stating that:



Programs and courses that focus on areas such as critical theory, literature, feminism, ethics, environmentalism, post-colonialism, philosophy, and sociology suggest an intellectual cosmopolitanism or a concern with social issues that will be either eliminated or technicized because their role in the market will be judged as ornamental. (p.157)

Giroux is arguing that in a neoliberal vision of education the theoretical disciplines concerned with questions of justice and equity have little value. The website analysis give credence to this argument as the narrative of the real world largely represents a direct challenge to the utility of more theoretical disciplines.

In the interview section of this study, some professors lend further evidence to this issue while discussing the notion of students who see their education as a series of qualifications that need to be gained before moving on with their professional lives. For instance, as previously discussed, Noah used the idea of students seeing their education as a series of hoops that need to be jumped through and Olivia spoke of a similar attitude she encounters in her practice as an educator. The previously mentioned term “credentialism” might help classify this attitude but there is a connection in logic between the concept that education is merely a qualification for a future goal and the idea that a practical education is superior to one based in more theoretical pursuits.

***Neoliberalization.*** The idea of focusing on the process of the neoliberalization, as Sophia put it, rather than on neoliberalism, is perhaps the most important conclusion that can be drawn from the results of both the interviews and the website analysis. In Sophia’s remark and use of the term “neoliberalization,” there is the idea of change and the active elements of neoliberal practice rather than a narrow focus on a discrete set of policies or

outcomes. For instance, Noah talked about how neoliberalism is like the water in a fishbowl, the fish does not recognize the water because it is ubiquitous. Liam spoke about how we are all on the same train of neoliberalization and that there is no getting off this train. These observations fit into Emma's previously mentioned idea about focusing on the tiny textured moments of life to look for the infiltration of ideology and this helps to contextualize the findings from the website analysis. The change that is being pointed to in both of these analogies is not necessarily overt. For instance, in the website analysis there were many sites that used subtle corporate language. By using the signs and vocabulary of the corporate world to engage with the outside world, there is no distinction between education and other commodities. Similarly, the real world argument that appeared in many of the websites is also a subtle message to the audience of these websites. The focus on the post-graduation world of careers and economic viability for the students seems at odds with a pure version of academic intrigue and curiosity. This is similar to Saunders' (2010) argument that despite of the reality of that there was likely never a universal golden age of democratic education at universities like those suggested by Giroux (1999) or Aronowitz (2000), there is the reality that there has been an, "intense focus on revenue generation and the embracing of an economic rationality has led to dramatic changes in institutional priorities and a vocationalization of the curriculum that was not present in previous incarnations of the university" (Saunders, 2010, p. 55). Saunders' claim is seemingly found in the website analysis and in some of the experiences of the professors in this study. Reflecting on the history of the university system in Canada as discussed in Chapter 2, outside forces have always helped define and change university education. In some periods the importance of religion was

paramount, in other periods the development of a managerial class for the early nation states. Currently, it seems reasonable that the gradual reduction of government funding for universities and the growth of a consumerist identity in society might also influence the way that universities engage with the public and how universities manage their affairs.

Liam discussed his experiences on how the management of universities is growing similar to the management techniques of private industry by monitoring the outputs of professors. This change in management is not an overt change but a subtle change. Olivia had similar concerns regarding the continuous expectations of students for instant responses to emails and an expectation of the professor being similar to a service provider rather than a somewhat more hierarchical relationship between the student and professor more akin to that of a master and an apprentice. It is a subtle shift that might reflect the growth of neoliberalism in somewhat stealthy ways. On their own, these changes might be ignored, but taken as a whole, they suggest a shift in the way that universities function.

Olivia went on to speak about how parents are told to think of themselves as clients and that the education is a service that is being bought like any other consumer product. On its own, this observation could be dismissed but the website analysis lends credence to this observation in that in many of the websites were essentially complex advertisements using the same marketing ideas a consumer would expect from a commercial product.

The net result of this altered relationship between the student and the professor is the recasting of the roles and expectations of the student. Olivia explains this by focusing

on online courses that cater to a group of students who cannot be physically on campus, and this type of student demands a different level of service from the professors. She argues that these students want instant replies to emails and that the work is rewarded, regardless of its academic merit, as determined by the professor. To the point where graduate level student argue that: “I don’t want to do any thinking on this, I just want you to tell me what I need to do” (May 14, 2015).

Olivia’s anecdotal story could be just one misguided graduate student, yet this example represents what an altered view of education looks like. It is reasonable for a student, even a graduate student, who has been told their education is theoretical, valueless without employment and just another consumer service, to accept this version of education. Quite understandably, these students will tend to view education in the terms that it is being discussed by the institutions. The high price of the tuition fees, textbooks, and rent in the dorms will only reinforce this conception of education. This study found that educational marketing is hardly different from any other product. Given the high prices, it is almost reasonable that students would see education as a luxury service. Therefore it is normal to expect students to see the university in the same manner as any other luxury levels and therefore demand customer satisfaction in all aspects of their educational experience.

Liberalism and its offshoot neoliberalism, as pointed out in the introduction, assume the primacy of the individual. In a liberal democratic state, this is a fairly intuitive and seemingly natural basic unit of division within society. The judiciary system and the election system of a country like Canada are based on individual rights and individual voting. The neoliberal turn in this somewhat accepted concept of the individual, takes

away responsibility, as Emma would see it, from the concept of the individual. Instead of a contract between the individual and society that involves a certain amount of responsibility to others, the individual is transformed into a consumer with no responsibilities to the state and the state cuts any ties to the individual.

The narrative found on many of the university websites seems to reinforce a commoditized notion of education. These are largely subtle arguments and they are found in multiple ways throughout a majority of the websites in the study. The power of neoliberalism is seemingly this subtle control that a market focused narrative has on both the websites and in the practice of professors as educators and researchers. To a large extent, neoliberalism's effects are not so pronounced that they are easily identified. This is the point that Ethan when he argued that neoliberalism robs the ability for citizens to discuss the larger systemic issues that affect everyone because our complaints seem so disparate and unconnected. In dealing with Logan's criticisms with respect to his argument that neoliberalism is an imprecise term that is used by critics as a term of abuse rather than as defined phenomena, this study provides the evidence that his critique is not justified. Neoliberalism is a distinct set of economic and political ideas that manifests itself in the practice of Canadian universities. However, the effects of these distinct ideas are sometimes hidden. This study identified some of these areas where neoliberalism has an impact on the marketing of universities and the practice of university educators.

## **Conclusion**

This study began by quoting Bloom (1987) whose work included translating Plato's *Republic* (1968), ultimately, is a discussion of what constitutes justice and what a just society entails. Bloom warns that if society is not careful about the type of education

being offered at universities, there might be a generation of students produced who have all the self-confidence of university graduates but who are ultimately deaf to the ideas that universities ought to have taught them. The essential argument that Bloom made in regards to higher education is for society and policymakers to at least understand what kind of education is being offered in the university and what goals it might serve. This study ultimately asks if university education is being affected by neoliberalism. The Republic sought to determine what the best way of ordering society would be but, through the course of the dialogue the question of what outcomes were intended for this system had to be answered first. In a similar way to Bloom and Plato, this study highlights what universities are actually doing in both their communications and in the experiences of university educators and whether this is the intended outcome for education. The study approached this question by using CDA, to examine the websites and ethnographic interviews to provide contextual support and insights.

In the results, there is a clear indication that the representation of some of the ways that the discourse used in recruiting students and communicating to the outside world is being affected by neoliberalism. In some websites, there were arguments based in the human capital theory of education that was described by Ayers (2005), and Hylsop-Margisson and Sears (2006) in Chapter 2. The logic of human capital theory is that education should be primarily based on the potential economic benefits. This view of education might be well received by students who are seeking to find a prosperous and economically stable life and it could even be argued that this focus for higher education would serve to help those from economically depressed backgrounds.

Further, the results indicate that on many of the websites examined, education is presented in a similar fashion as a consumer product. The overall look and design of the websites are akin to any retail product. This helps to reinforce the notion of education as a commodity and could be responsible for the findings of studies like Singleton-Jackson, et al. (2010) and Saunders (2010) who found that Millennial students tend to demonstrate a sense of entitlement with regards to grades and academic achievement. This attitude of some students is reinforced by the findings of the interview portion of this study. Many of the professors spoke of students who expected a certain level of service from their professors that may not have existed in previous generations.

There is a seemingly cyclical nature to the purpose of university education as was discussed in the section of the study dealing with the history of universities in Canada and in the world in general. In gross terms, from the first medieval universities in Europe up until the dawn of the twentieth century, universities were mainly institutes controlled by religious groups. The world was introduced the federal government into the development of universities and higher education in Canada. Finally, since the 1970's the federal government has steadily removed the funding for universities from their transfer payments to the provinces. In this vacuum and in an era of the rapid adoption of neoliberal policies and economic ideas, the universities in Canada have little recourse but to seek out higher enrolments and corporate funding.

During the same period, a globalized consumer culture expanded and there has been a spread of neoliberal ideals into the way that public policy issues are debated. This was discussed in Chapter 2 and might help to explain, to a degree, the impact of neoliberalism on universities in Canada. Neoliberalism helps explain the narratives of the

websites examined and helps explain the environment that the professors in this study related. Whether or not neoliberalism is a positive or negative force on university education is potential source of debate. However, if it is a force, and this study has shown that there is a case to be made for this, then it should be examined. The role and purpose of university education should be, at the very least, explicitly stated for no other purpose than to determine if these universities are successful in their own terms.

This study demonstrates areas for further research including expanding the sample size of universities examined. Likewise, an examination of other materials that can be found on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter along with physical documents such as brochures could also provide for a fuller picture of how neoliberal ideology may, or, may not, infiltrate into the messaging of universities. In this study, an admitted blind spot is the effect of these materials on the view of education for students. This could be an area of study that involves gaining insights on how these materials did or did not affect student choices, what expectations students had before going to universities and a variety of other research questions into the same areas. This study provides a solid foundation for further research into the nature, purpose, and perceptions of higher education and the potential effects of neoliberalism on the university system.

In review, the research goals of this study were to examine how neoliberalism might affect university education in Canada. I explored recruitment messaging and the perceived impact that professors encountered in their daily activities as educators. These questions were addressed with appropriate methodological choices and evidence was found of the impact of neoliberal ideas on the practice of higher education in Canada. In an era where university education has become ever more popular and costly to individual



students, the purpose of universities needs to be better understood and clearly stated. This clarity will help determine the benefits and the costs of these institutions to society and to individual students.

In an era of the proliferation of neoliberal ideology, universities need to define their function and their goals with relation to this dominant ideology. If the choice, even if brought about by financial pressure from an ever-shrinking source of public funding, is to embrace a market defined version of education, then the implications of this definition of education should be considered. Ultimately, determining the function and purpose of education is a fundamental task of education research. This study helps to contribute to this fundamental definitional task by determining how market ideas have infiltrated into the self-definition of universities and the practice of university education in Canada.

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## Appendix 1: Recruitment Letter

July 2014

### Probing Neoliberalism in Higher Education

Dear potential research participant:

My name is Antonio Redfern Pucci and I am a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. I am conducting a research study as a part of my dissertation project into the impact of neoliberalism on higher education and I am seeking professors with either **sociology, philosophy, and/ or critical pedagogy backgrounds** to share with me their thoughts and ideas on neoliberalism and their experience as university professors. The research will involve a semi-structured interview session where interviewee will have the opportunity to share their ideas about neoliberalism and higher education.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a sharp rise in both the enrolment in undergraduate programs and in the cost of these programs throughout North America. Given the clear surge in the perceived value of acquiring a university education, it behooves educators, students, and society as a whole to ask deep questions about what ideologies and forces are at work that shape academia, both within and without. Of the ideologies at work in society neoliberalism is undoubtedly of great significance.

If this premise is accepted that higher education has undergone profound changes over the past 20 years and neoliberalism is at least partially responsible for these changes, then assessing its influence is a timely pursuit.

Interviews for this study will be conducted either online or in person depending on your availability. I have acquired permission from the Research Ethics Board of Lakehead University to conduct the research.

Please contact me, Antonio Redfern Pucci PhDc at [anredfer@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:anredfer@lakeheadu.ca) if you are interested in participating.

This project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Gerald Walton. He can be reached at [gwalton@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:gwalton@lakeheadu.ca)

I look forward to hearing from you and speaking with you about neoliberal influence in your practice as a professor.

Sincerely,

Antonio Redfern Pucci

## Appendix 2: Consent Form

October 2014

### Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understood the Letter of Information for Antonio Redfern Pucci's doctoral research project under the supervision of Dr. Gerald Walton entitled *The Consumed University: Probing Neoliberalism in Higher Education*.

I agree to participate under the conditions described in the Letter of Introduction. Further, I understand that:

- There are no foreseeable risks of participation, and the benefits are that I will be contributing to advancing knowledge about an under-researched area of study, namely the influence of neoliberalism in higher education.
- I can withdraw from the study at any time, and may choose to not answer any particular question for any reason.
- The interview will be recorded (either in person by an audio recording program or via an online conference platform).
- The digital audio files will be transcribed to text and given pseudonym's to hide the identity of the respondent. All references to institutions or places which could identify the respondent in their transcripts will similarly be disguised. Once this is done the audio files will be deleted. The audio files will not be shared with anyone, or uploaded to the Internet in any way. The transcripts will be kept on Dr. Gerald Walton's computer for a period of 5 years under lock and key.
- Transcripts from the interview and publications from this research will not contain identifying information. Any such information will be deleted or disguised (i.e. through the use of pseudonyms rather than real names).
- I will receive notification that the transcript of my interview is ready and I can opt to add, delete, or alter information at that time.

Being a participant in this study I understand that the interviews will be recorded and I give permission to Antonio Redfern Pucci under the supervision of Dr. Gerald Walton to record our conversation.

(Please check either Yes:\_\_\_\_ or No:\_\_\_\_)

I would like to receive a draft of the research project, and here is my email address to receive an electronic version. I understand that neither Antonio Redfern Pucci nor Dr. Gerald Walton will share my address with anyone.

(Please check either Yes:\_\_\_\_ or No:\_\_\_\_)

**Participant's Signature**

**Date**

**Appendix 3: Website Information**

University	Website	Date Accessed
Brock University	<a href="http://www.brocku.ca/">http://www.brocku.ca/</a>	10/08/2014
Carleton University	<a href="http://www.carleton.ca/">http://www.carleton.ca/</a>	09/30/2014
Concordia University	<a href="https://www.concordia.ca/">https://www.concordia.ca/</a>	10/08/2014
Memorial University of Newfoundland	<a href="http://www.mun.ca/">http://www.mun.ca/</a>	09/30/2014
Ryerson University	<a href="http://www.ryerson.ca/index.html">http://www.ryerson.ca/index.html</a>	10/07/2014
Simon Fraser University	<a href="http://www.sfu.ca/">http://www.sfu.ca/</a>	09/12/2014
Wilfred University	<a href="http://www.wlu.ca/">http://www.wlu.ca/</a>	10/07/2014
York University	<a href="http://www.yorkuniversity.ca/web/index.htm">http://www.yorkuniversity.ca/web/index.htm</a>	10/03/2014
University of Guelph	<a href="http://www.uoguelph.ca/">http://www.uoguelph.ca/</a>	09/16/2014
University of New Brunswick	<a href="http://www.unb.ca/">http://www.unb.ca/</a>	09/14/2014
University of Regina	<a href="http://www.uregina.ca/">http://www.uregina.ca/</a>	10/01/2014
University of Victoria	<a href="http://www.uvic.ca/">http://www.uvic.ca/</a>	09/11/2014
University of Waterloo	<a href="https://uwaterloo.ca/">https://uwaterloo.ca/</a>	09/14/2014
University of Windsor	<a href="http://www.uwindsor.ca/">http://www.uwindsor.ca/</a>	10/08/2014